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JANUARY 2019 ISSUE 261

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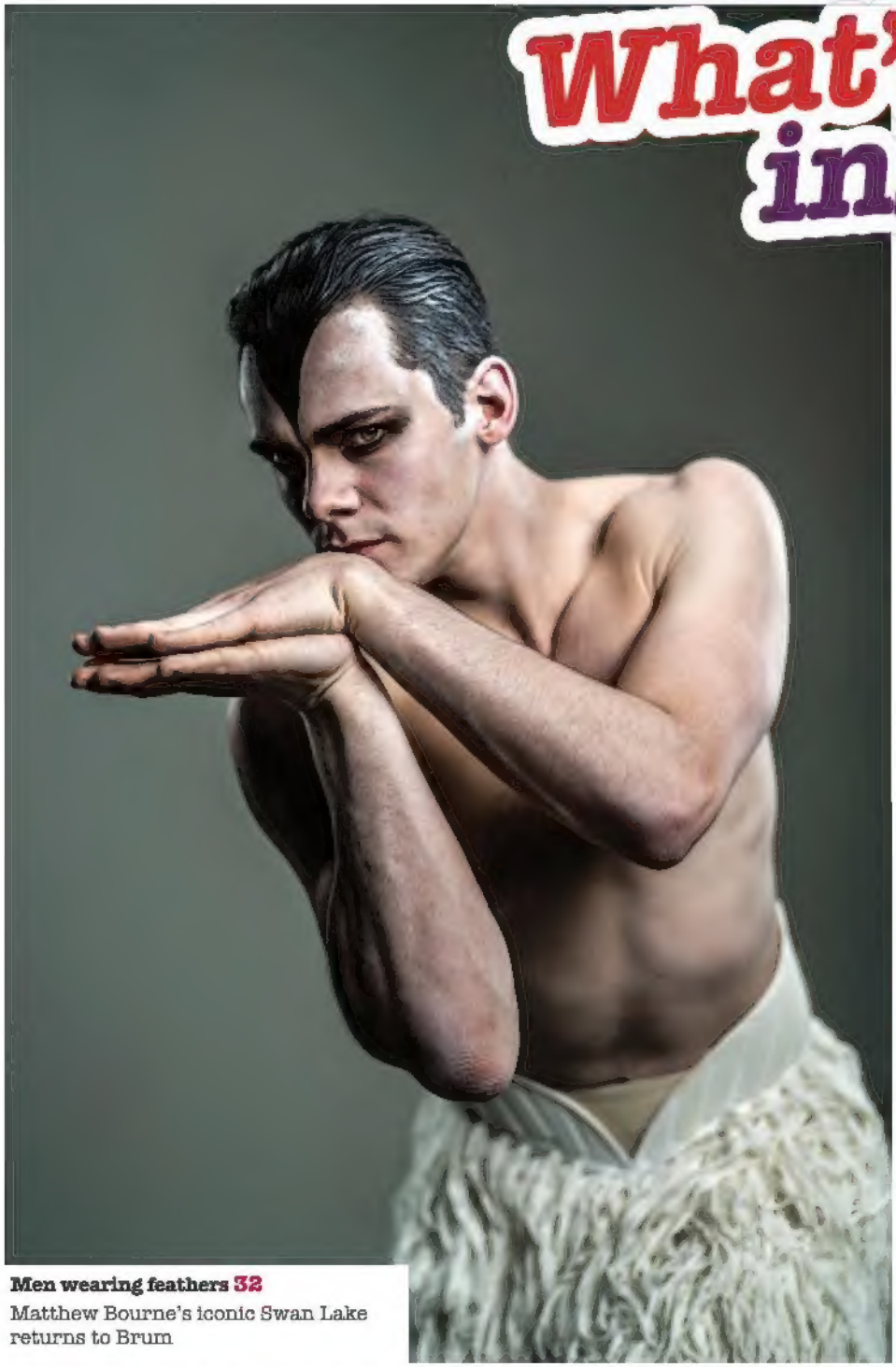

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2019

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Have ya heard?

Fundraising page helps with Spencer funeral costs

A fundraising page set up in memory of the late Spencer Cormell, who passed away suddenly on 21 November, has 'by far exceeded' its original target of £2,000.

A long-term friend of Spencer's, Vicky Hancock - known to many as Pink Vicky - set up the fund to help his family with funeral costs.

"This was the last thing I wanted Spencer's mum to have to worry about when she was grieving," Vicky told Midlands Zone.

"I originally thought that if we could raise £2k, it would be a great help to his family. When this was reached within 10 days, I thought why not continue to help as much as possible."

At the time of going to print, the fund stands at £3,040. The page will remain open while people still wish to donate.

Vicky, who first met Spencer while working at Angels (now Sidewalk), paid glowing tribute to the popular DJ: "I was shocked and devastated to hear of the passing of Spencer. He was one of the most charismatic, generous and funny people I've ever met. All he ever wanted to do was make people laugh and be happy.

He really deserves the best send-off possible, as he was one of a kind and will be missed by so many."

If you wish to donate to the fund, go to: https://uk.gofundme.com/spencer-cormell

RuPaul announces UK version of Drag Race for 2019

RuPaul has announced that a UK version of his Emmy Award-winning Drag Race show will air in 2019.

The legendary drag star confirmed on her Twitter account that there will be an eight-part UK series of the hit TV talent contest, which boasts an international audience of millions and is broadcast around the world.

Commenting on the news, RuPaul said: "I am beyond excited to celebrate the massive charisma, uniqueness, nerve and talent of the Queen's queens. And before anyone asks, yes, we would be thrilled to have Meghan Markle join us, as we are already preparing a 'Royal-Mother-To-Be' runway challenge."

Both RuPaul and Michelle Visage are set to host the show. The series will be filmed in London, and the producers are on the lookout for UK drag queens to star in the show.

Birmingham LGBT triumphs at Midlands Leadership Awards

Local charity Birmingham LGBT has won the 2018 Midlands Leadership Award for Best Leadership Programme.

The prestigious awards ceremony, held at Edgbaston Stadium, recognises the achievements of individuals and organisations across the business community. It also celebrates the positive difference that outstanding leaders can make by enabling others to reach their full potential in the workplace.

Winning the award for its Leadership Programme - a course that equips LGBT leaders of the future with the skills, knowledge and confidence to excel in business - brought to a close a hugely successful 2018 for Birmingham LGBT. The charity also won a GSK King's Fund Health Impact Award in the spring.

Commenting on the win, Birmingham LGBT's Steph Keeble said: "I am very proud of the work we've done to support LGBT leaders in the corporate, public and third sectors, and was delighted to accept the accolade on behalf of the organisation. It's fantastic that our work has been recognised in this way."

Myra Dubois to visit Birmingham with a Christmas show - in the spring!

The self-declared siren of South Yorkshire, Myra Dubois, is visiting the Midlands in April with 'the best Christmas show you'll see in spring'.

The show, We Wish You A Myra Christmas, offers an evening of 'off-season seasonal singalongs and summertime yuletide anecdotes from Christmases past', all delivered with her trademark acerbic wit.
Myra appears at Birmingham's Midlands Arts Centre on Thursday 25 April.
To book tickets, visit macbirmingham.co.uk

Contemporary LGBT poet Andrea Gibson set to bring new tour to the Midlands

The winner of the first ever Women Of The World Poetry Slam - LGBT poet Andrea Gibson - will visit the Midlands this spring with a tour based on her recently published collection of work.

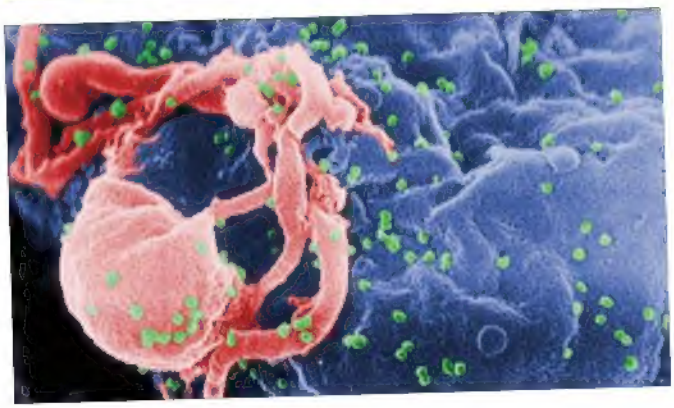
One of spoken-word poetry's most captivating performers, Andrea regularly sells out 500-plus-capacity standing-room-only venues.

The work around which her new tour is centred, Lord Of The Butterflies, is said to present 'a fierce oscillation between activism and love'. It was published in November 2018.

Publicity for the collection describes it as: 'An artful and nuanced look at gender, romance, loss and family. While rioting against gun violence, homophobia and white supremacy, Gibson celebrates gender expansion, queer love and the will to stay alive. Each emotion in Lord Of The Butterflies is deft and delicate, resting within imagery heavy enough to sink the heart, while giving the body wings to soar."

Andrea performs at Birmingham's Glee Club on Monday 13 May and Nottingham's Glee Club on Thursday 16 May. Tickets are available at nvite.com/community/AndreaGibsonTour

UK beats UN '90-90-90' target on way to erasing HIV, reports Public Health England



Public Health England has announced that the UK has hit a key UN target on the way to eradicating the HIV epidemic, diagnosing and effectively treating more than 90 percent of people with the virus.

In the UK last year, there were an estimated 102,000 people living with HIV, with eight percent believed to be unaware of their infection.

UNAIDS set a '90-90-90' target for every country, calling for all health authorities to diagnose more than 90 percent of people with the virus, put 90 percent on treatment and make sure 90 percent experienced viral suppression.

The UK has beaten the 90-90-90 target, diagnosing 92 percent, putting 98 percent on treatment and ensuring that 97 percent experienced viral suppression.

Have ya heard?

Scotland set to become the first country in the UK to legally recognise a third gender

Scotland is set to become the first UK nation to legally recognise a third gender identity.

As well as being able to identify as male or female in official documents, Scottish citizens would also be able to identify as non-binary, which means they don't prescribe to either gender.

In an independent analysis of a consultation conducted by the Scottish Government, 65 per cent of Scottish respondents said that they wanted to see ministers 'take action to recognise non-binary people'.

The consultation attracted more than 15,000 responses after it was launched last year. It was created as part of plans to redefine the Gender Recognition Act 2004, the aim being to make people's application to legally change their gender simpler and less intrusive.

Video artist wins Turner Prize 2018 with two queer films

Glasgow-based video artist Charlotte Prodger says she feels "overwhelmed" after winning the Turner Prize 2018 with two short films based around queer identity.

One of the films she created - titled Bridgit - was shot on an iPhone and features Prodger reading from her diaries.

"The stories that I'm telling, although they're mine and they're personal, are stories that a lot of people - I guess queer people - have experienced," she told BBC News.

The Turner Prize annually recognises the very best in contemporary British art and honours artists under the age of 50. The winner takes home a prize of £25,000.

Bishops back inquiry into Gay Conversion Therapy

An online survey of people who have engaged in gay conversion therapy is being backed by two bishops from the Church of England.

Gay conversion therapy is still being used by some religious groups in a bid to try and convert LGBT people to heterosexuality. Its treatments can range from counselling to 'corrective rape', in which the victim is made to have sex with a member of the opposite gender.

The new survey is to be conducted by the Ozanne Foundation, which works with religious organisations to stop discrimination. It has the support of the Bishop of Liverpool, Paul Bayes, and the Bishop on Manchester, David Walker.

In talking about the survey, Bishop Bayes said he was concerned that conversion therapy was still being used by some religious groups.

Speaking about the survey to the Sunday Times, Jayne Ozanne, director of the Ozanne Foundation, said: "Like many, I voluntarily chose to put myself through various forms of deliverance ministry and emotional healing in order to try and rid myself of my unwanted sexual desires, as I believed them to be sinful. "Sadly, this ended with me being hospitalised twice for severe abdominal pain caused by stress and two nervous breakdowns. If I had understood the dangers, I would never have put myself through such emotional and spiritual abuse."

The UK government last year announced that it intended to ban gay conversion therapy.

Local Life Story

Name: Fierce Fantasy DJs (Leona and Chanelle)

Places of birth: Ashton-under-Lyne and Liverpool

Star signs: Taurus and Scorpio

Ages: 63 and 39

About Leona & Chanelle

Where did you grow up?

Chanelle: Liverpool.
Leona: Ashton-under-Lyne and Australia.

Single or attached?

Together: We're married. We got married officially in the Lake District in 2016, but we did have a sham wedding in Las Vegas. Chanelle wanted a goth wedding, but we ended up with a minister as Dead Elvis. It wasn't good.

What makes you happy?

C: Being with my wife, as she's also my best friend.
L: Chanelle. She is the best thing that's happened to me.

What makes you sad?

C: Death. I want to live forever and be a vampire - but none of that Twilight sparkly shit!
L: The age difference between Chanelle and I.

What makes you angry?

Both: FAKE PEOPLE! You meet so many on the entertainment scene. A lot of people get away with being fake because they put on an act that fools a lot of people.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

C: I would change my teeth. I want veneers, but not ones that make you look like a horse!
L: I want bum implants, but I'm scared of them exploding like you hear in those horror stories!

What's been the most embarrassing thing you've done in your life?

C: I vomited all over myself in the middle of a packed club after drinking a bottle of sambuca!
L: I had the runs once and soiled my pants! I was driving at the time and couldn't get back home fast enough!

Coming out

When did you first know you were gay?

C: I knew from about seven. I used to colour-in Page Three girls!
L: I knew I was transgender at eight, but I've always been attracted to girls, even after I changed.

When did you come out?

C: I was 32.
L: I changed gender at 56 and got a girlfriend, so I guess that's when people saw me as lesbian.

Who was the first person you told you were gay, and what was their reaction?

C: All my friends at work, but they kind of guessed, as I was dating a drag queen at the time and didn't like seeing her out of drag.
L: I first told my sister that I was trans.

What would you say to a youngster trying to come to terms with their own sexuality?

C: Always have a good circle of friends or family around you. Always remember it's your life - you have to do what makes you happy.
L: Just be you. Ignore the haters. As long as you're happy, that's all that matters.

Have you ever had any experiences with the opposite sex?

C: Yes, but I faked it like a porn star!
L: Oh god no!

Your career

When you were younger, what did you want to be?

C: I wanted to be a vet, but couldn't bear the thought of putting animals down. Plus, I couldn't put my hand up a cow's bum with these nails!
L: To be me - ie, to change gender.

Quickfire

Who's your favourite actor?
C: Doug Bradley from Hellraiser.
L: Mark Wahlberg or Keanu Reeves.

What's your favourite book?
C: The True Blood series.
L: I've never read a book!

Half empty or half full?
Together: Always half full! There's always room for more fierceness.

What's your favourite food?
C: Veggie curry.
L: Spaghetti.

What was your first job when you left school?

C: A podium dancer in my knickers!
L: An electro plater - boring but good money!

What's your job role now?

Together: DJs!

What are the challenges in your job?

Together: To be the best at what we do and always stand out, with both the way we look and our sound.

What are the highlights?

Together: Making people happy - it's the best high ever!

Where do you see yourselves in five years' time?

Together: We will have our own club and be plastic surgery-ed to the max!

Gay scene

How long have you been frequenting the Midlands gay scene?

Together: For about 18 months.

And what's been your fondest memory of the scene?

Together: The amount of lovely people we've met who are now close friends of ours.

Who's your favourite cabaret act on the scene?

Together: Miss Penny!

Who's your favourite person on the scene?

Together: Our daddy bear, Andrew King, from The Fox.

What do you most enjoy about the scene?

Together: Everyone is so friendly, and all the bars work together to create an amazing and positive space for the gay community. We also love the amount of lovely spaces to sit outside, even in the winter!

How would you change the scene?

Together: Make it bigger!

Time out

Where do you like to go on a night out?

Together: We go on a pub crawl: Missing, The Loft, The Fox, Sidewalk, Eden, and then we finish in The Nightingale.

What do you do to relax?

C: Kill zombies on my PS4.
L: Shop on eBay.

What do you enjoy on TV?

C: Into The Dark.
L: Slasher.

Which one website do you spend the most time on?

Together: Anything for fierce costumes or wigs for our job!

What was the last album or track you bought?

Together: Sharon Needle's Battle Axe.

What type of holiday do you prefer?

Together: A beach holiday with cocktails and a jacuzzi!

And how about your favourite drink?

C: A cosmo or a porn star martini. I'm the pisshead out of the two of us.
L: Tomato juice or a milkshake. I don't drink; I never have.

Madonna or Lady Gaga?

Together: LADY GAGA!

If you could take a selfie with one person alive or dead, who would it be?

Together: Marilyn Monroe or David Bowie.

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CHEMFIDENTIAL

THERE'S SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR CHEMSEX USERS AT THE BIRMINGHAM LGBT CENTRE

Are you looking to make a change in 2019?

The party season's over and it's time to make some New Year resolutions for 2019.

Many of us will have heard about Chemsex, maybe indulged in it ourselves or perhaps know(n) someone who has.

Chemsex isn't just having sexual encounters while under the influence of recreational drugs after a night out; it's a planned (organised) meet-up involving the 'unholy trinity' of drugs: Methamphetamine (Crystal Meth), Mephedrone (Mkat) and Gammahydroxybutrate (GHB)

In the short term, these drugs may offer escapism and freedom from the stresses and strains of life, but they can have a detrimental effect further down the line.

If Chemsex is something that's affected you, Birmingham LGBT runs a service that can provide help and support.

CHEMFIDENTIAL is offered by Birmingham LGBT in partnership with Umbrella. The service provides a safe, confidential and judgement-free space for clients to talk about their sexual health and chem use, employ harm reduction strategies and build support plans to navigate through their desired changes.

The service provides: PrEP advice, monitoring and support; useful guidelines about consent and setting boundaries; information about different approaches to safer sex; access to one-to-one support and easy access to other professional support from partner organisations; access to 'safer Chemsex' packs; awareness of chems and their effects; and guidance regarding what to do in an emergency.

Gay & bisexual men accessing mainstream drug and alcohol services are very underrepresented, and often wouldn't consider themselves to be drug users/addicts. They present more often at sexual health services, but may still require specialist help and support to understand the complexities involved with Chemsex.

More information can be found at blgbt.org/services/sexual-health/specialist-services/chemsex-support

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

The Midlands gay scene boasts some of the most fabulous cabaret acts in the business, so we thought we'd check in with six of the best to discuss their highlights of 2018 - and to find out what they're most looking forward to in 2019...

What was your 2018 highlight?

My highlight career-wise was definitely realising the kind of gig that makes me happy, and really focusing on doing that kind of show. I've been very lucky. I've done some incredible gigs and been offered some amazing opportunities, most recently to perform in Vegas as Pink, which, coming from the UK, I take as a massive compliment.

Best gig in 2018?

There were so many. I'm performing with my amazing band so much more now. They're a fabulous bunch of human beings and players, so it's a real honour every time I play with them. We started our Fake Festival tour in 2018, which was another level. I'll always remember that gig. Sitges Pride was also a massive rush. Nothing better than standing on stage in Sitges in my pants. Lovely stuff.

Best heckle in 2018?

Whenever anyone tells me I must be miming, I take that as a massive back handed compliment! It's a sad world if a tribute act has to mime, so they must think it sounds pretty alright!

Best 'put down' in 2018?

I'm all about the positivity Just going out and doing what I do best will always silence any would be critics

Most outrageous moment in 2018?

Wow, that's a hard one! I'm very civilised these days!

Which song or sketch that you performed last year got the best reaction from the audience?

I'm lucky because Pink has come back into the limelight with a good album and a massive tour, so it's such a good time to be performing her massive hits. So many people were so positive about the shows last year. Being able to perform the material live with my band has certainly elevated the show to another level, and people have loved it. Also A Million Dreams (Greatest Showman Remastered) is such an ear worm that people are loving that one and singing along very loudly!

What did you learn about yourself in 2018?

I learned loads, actually! I learned not to tolerate people who aren't good for me (professionally and personally). I've definitely become more principled as I've gotten older! I don't put up with things that aren't right anymore I used to kinda let people walk all over me, but not now. I'm clearer about what I want as a person, who I am and what makes me happy

Biggest regret of the year?

I don't regret anything.

Did you fulfill your 2018 New Year resolution?

My resolution every year is to be happy and find pleasure in simple things. I always try and do that. And to lose weight. But that will never happen.

What are you most looking forward to in 2019?

A little break in the new year, then getting back out there with my Pink show. I have some incredible gigs, Pride events and tons of festivals planned.

If you could choose any other current UK cabaret artist to perform with, who would it be?

I adore Miss Penny, and always love spending time with her. There are so many brilliant artists around at the moment, and I'm always happy when there's someone else on the bill.

Miss Marty

What was your 2018 highlight?

Birmingham Pride. It's always an honour to be part of it all and to perform alongside such a diverse group of artists. To stand up there and see a whole community come together is always amazing.

Best gig in 2018?

There were a few. Every show was different because each one was made by the people who came to see me - but my stand-out show has to be my set at Birmingham Pride on the cabaret stage I'd had terrible news just prior to going on, but the atmosphere was amazing and the entire tent got involved. We did the conga and had a singalong. It was fab!

Best heckle in 2018?

I'm quite lucky, I don't get heckled much. That said, I'm getting on a bit, so maybe I just don't hear them! I did get asked, "Don't you think you're a bit old for this?" No, dear, no I don't.

Best 'put down' in 2018?

How about you take a selfie, baby, then photoshop some better life choices into it!

Most outrageous moment in 2018?

I had the pleasure of hosting a charity event for the Geoff Horsfield Foundation at the Botanical Gardens. I've been known to do some naughty games, but never imagined that a celebrated footballer would ever get naked on my stage. Fair play, Geoff!

Which song or sketch that you performed last year got the best reaction from the audience?

Without a doubt This Is Me, from The Greatest Showman. I think it means so many different things to so many people.

What did you learn about yourself in 2018?

I learned a few things; that I'm not too old to still be doing this; that I can achieve anything if I put my mind to it; but I think most importantly, that I'm no better than my audience, and in fact am only as good as they make me I have quite a blessed life, and that's down to them, so thank you to each and every one of them.

Biggest regret of the year?

I don't really have many regrets, although I have had a few experiences of bad health this year, and it's always horrible if I have to let down a venue

Did you fulfill your 2018 New Year resolution?

I don't really make resolutions anymore because I never kept them. I think if you want to do something, you'll do it when you're ready anyways.

If you did make them, what would it be for 2019?

I guess if I did, it would be to spend more time with family and friends.

What are you most looking forward to in 2019?

I recently got engaged, so I'm looking forward to spending more time making memories with my beautiful fella. Soppy but true.

If you could choose any other current UK cabaret artist to perform with, who would it be?

I have a little something coming up in the near future with the fabulous Ginny Lemon, which I'm very excited about. But I also have to say that it would be lovely to work more with my drag sister, Miss Penny. We used to mash it up all the time, and I miss that. It's always fun on stage with her. It's not like a show; it's just two mates misbehaving and taking everybody along for the ride

Jupita and Minerva Saturno

What was your 2018 highlight?

Performing on stage with the likes of Stooshe, Sonique, Lolly, Mutya and Coco Star.

Best gig in 2018?

Proud Mary with Lady Imelda at The Yard in Coventry.

Best heckle in 2018?

When somebody bought Minerva drinks all night to punch him in the face.

Best 'put down' in 2018?

My mum's dog

Most outrageous moment in 2018?

Switching to Diet Coke because of the sugar tax. Outrageous!

Which song or sketch that you performed last year got the best reaction from the audience?

Working with many London queens at Camp As Concrete drag night in Shoreditch. It was out of our comfort zone being in a new place, but they were all so welcoming!

What did you learn about yourself in 2018?

Hard fronts are faster!

Biggest regret of the year?

We don't really have regrets. It was the most positive year of our lives

Did you fulfill your 2018 New Year resolution?

We planned to start YouTube and we have. Go like, comment and subscribe at The Saturnos...

What will it be for 2019?

To gain an even bigger following and progress further with our careers.

What are you most looking forward to in 2019?

Mexico Pride in February and sleep!

What was your 2018 highlight?

Appearing in the Commonwealth Games handover to Birmingham. It went live from the Gold Coast in Australia across the whole Commonwealth, seen by millions of people. One word. Phenomenal!

Best gig in 2018?

There were two. My debut at Mary's in Cardiff on an international rugby night, with all the rugby lads out (I snogged one!). And the Marine Tavern stage at Brighton Pride, where all you could see from the top of the street to the seafront was people singing along and dancing!

Best heckle in 2018?

I don't really get heckled. I think it's because I look like a rough bird who could knock 'em out. They're too scared!

Best 'put down' in 2018?

I was told I had 'shit eyebrows' by a girl who looked like she'd drawn hers on with a bingo dabber. That was probably the best, if not the most hypocritical, put-down I had.

Most outrageous moment in 2018?

There were a few I can't tell you about - but they can go in a book when I'm a bit older. I did get in an industrial sized bin in the summer for a laugh, with a fag and a can of Stella, after finishing a night at The Fox. And I've recently developed a habit of showing a bit of stocking to passers by whilst at the door at Missing on a Sunday evening!

Which song or sketch that you performed last year got the best reaction from the audience?

Belting out a big ballad in the voice of Cilla Black has to be a favourite and always gets a good reaction. And watching me hyperventilate after singing You Can't Stop The Beat from Hairspray is always a winner!

What did you learn about yourself in 2018?

On a serious note, I learned not to over-critique myself or overdo it - you can burn yourself out very quickly!

Biggest regret of the year?

Not collecting the McDonald's Monopoly vouchers, because I could've won at least four prizes!

Did you fulfill your 2018 New Year resolution?

If anything, I've *put on* weight, so definitely not!

What will it be for 2019?

To expand my horizons and take over the world (Insert evil laugh)!

What are you most looking forward to in 2019?

Visiting Auntie Di (Lady Diamond) in Sitges for a jolly - I'm definitely due a good holiday in the sunshine!

If you could choose any other current UK cabaret artist to perform with, who would it be?

Oh my god, it has to be Mary Mac! I adore her and fan girl every time I see her. I would absolutely *love* to collaborate with that haggis loving tart!

What was your 2018 highlight?

Birmingham Pride.

Best gig in 2018?

Always The Village in Birmingham and the Dover Castle in Leicester.

Best heckle in 2018?

Too many to mention...

Best 'put down' in 2018?

I want a dreamboat, not a shipwreck!

Most outrageous moment in 2018?

In Gran Canaria for Pride at the pool party, there was a man with the biggest penis. Well, I went 50 shades of white!

Which song or sketch that you performed last year got the best reaction from the audience?

Getting the whole of the Village Inn singing Hopelessly Devoted To You from Grease.

What did you learn about yourself in 2018?

To have more patience and stop worrying what people think of me.

Biggest regret of the year?

Not spending more time with my family since my mum passed.

Did you fulfill your 2018 New Year resolution?

Hell, no. Who does?

What will it be for 2019?

Perhaps doing more theatre - that's next on my list.

What are you most looking forward to in 2019?

Doing the Oval cricket ground for the Mayor of London.

If you could choose any other current UK cabaret artist to perform with, who would it be?

I've worked with some of the most incredible UK acts over the years, so I'm just happy to work with anyone!

What was your 2018 highlight?

There were a fair few! My first gigs at the Royal Vauxhall's Tavern, running the Birmingham Pride Cabaret Marquee alongside Connie, my 10th year as Doncaster Pride hostess. Oh, and the festive bake at Greggs!

Best gig in 2018?

That's so hard, but I have to say the Royal Vauxhall's Tavern. It's a different ball game in there!

Best heckle in 2018?

Heckles? Me? Have you seen what I do to people when they try? I've got a new pair of fresh testicle earrings on their way from the last one!

Best 'put down' in 2018?

Your bus leaves in 10 minutes... be under it!

Most outrageous moment in 2018?

I don't really think that's for this magazine, to be honest! All I can say is that there were five of us and it was very dark...

Which song or sketch that you performed last year got the best reaction from the audience?

The amount of shots I drink and you want me to remember?! It had to be singing All By Myself - the people just go nuts!

What did you learn about yourself

That I can double drop a Greggs sausage & bean melt.

Biggest regret of the year?

I never regret anything - what's the point?

Did you fulfill your 2018 New Year resolution?

I don't believe in them. I strive to get a few new venues and different gigs each year, but that's about it. I like life to roll along easily

What are you most looking forward to in 2019?

Money, a few nice holidays, extending my wardrobe even more - including wigs etc - more money, food and even more money!

If you could choose any other current UK cabaret artist to perform with, who would it be?

Oh my god! Why are you being so evil?! I've performed with many over the years. I do like gigging with, erm, the orange one... Mary? Maureen?... Marty! That's the one! It's always a hoot. She just can't shut me up these days like she used to. I want to work with Pam Ann again too. She's filth!

SPRING & SUMMER 2019 SEASON NOW ON SALE
1-16 FEB
An urgent new production of the Olivier Award-winning play
15-30 MAR
EDMOND DE BERGERAC
The hilarious comedy featuring Freddie Fox and Josie Lawrence
19-24 FEB
CIRQUE BERSERK!
Half-term family fun
2-18 MAY
A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS
Based on the novel by Khaled Hosseini
25 FEB – 2 MAR
TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD
Harper Lee's classic novel live on stage
CAPTAIN CORELLI'S MANDOLIN
REP BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY THEATRE
Box Office 0121 236 4455
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MIDLANDS

ZONE

Readers' Awards 2019

IT'S TIME TO VOTE!

The Midlands Zone Readers' Awards are back for 2019!

Yes, folks, it's that Midlands Zone Readers' Awards time of year again! We all have our favourite Midlands gay bars, clubs, stores, people, personalities and charities - and this is your chance to show how much you appreciate them. Nominate and vote for your favourites, to help them secure a title worthy of their work!

To enter the free prize draw for £1,000, simply VOTE and complete our **Readership Survey**, and we'll select a lucky winner at random!

Every year, thousands of you step up to the plate and vote for your favourites in the Midlands LGBT community. And if you want to do the same in 2019, you've only got until Friday 18 January to take part in the first round of voting!

Once we publish the February issue, we will be re-opening the voting and asking you to select from the **TOP 5** in each category.
All votes must be submitted online before Tuesday 28 February.

And don't forget to enter our FREE PRIZE DRAW for your chance to win a whopping £1,000 in cash! To enter, simply vote online and then complete our online readership survey.

The results of the Midlands Zone Readers' Awards will be announced in March.
Keep 'em peeled for more information!

This year's categories

Best Birmingham Gay Nightclub
Best Midlands Gay Nightclub (Outside B'ham)
Best Birmingham Gay Bar
Best Midlands Gay Bar (Outside B'ham)
Best Midlands Community Pub/Bar
Best Midlands Café Bar/Restaurant
Best Midlands Overall Gay Venue
Best Midlands Venue for Men
Best Midlands Venue for Women
Best Midlands Live Entertainment Venue
Best Midlands Gay Venue - Outdoor Area
Best Midlands One-Nighter
Best New Midlands Gay Venue
Best Midlands LGBT Pride Event
Best Midlands LGBT Event
Midlands LGBT Charity/Group of Achievement
Midlands LGBT Social/Sports Group
Midlands LGBT Personality of the Year
Best Midlands Compere/Host
Best Midlands Cabaret Act
Best National Cabaret Act
Midlands Friendliest Bar Person
Midlands LGBT Venue with the Friendliest Bar Staff
Midlands Friendliest Security/Door Person
Midlands LGBT Venue with the Best Security Door Staff
Midlands Bar DJ
Midlands Club DJ
Midlands Gay Sauna/Health Club
Midlands LGBT Friendly Store or Online Store
Youth Achievement Award
Lifetime Achievement Award
Outstanding Contribution to the LGBT Community

HOW TO VOTE:

SIMPLY LOG ON TO:
www.midlandszone.co.uk

DOCTOR BEAT

Dr Ranj talks about his Strictly experience and offers words of wisdom to fellow Gaysians on the brink of coming out...

Why Strictly, and why now?

I can answer that one straight away. It's because it's the first time they said yes! I've been a massive fan of the show for years, and it's always been my pipe dream, so when anyone has ever asked me which is the one show I would like to do, it was always Strictly. It's been my dream, and this year it just so happens to have come true. I was a little overwhelmed and shocked when it did.

You saw it through to week seven. What did the experience teach you about yourself?

It taught me that I'm far more resilient than I give myself credit for. Strictly has been the hardest thing I've ever done, both physically and mentally. I've got two degrees and work in children's A&E, but I found it to be physically very demanding. You have to train so hard, and it's taught me that I can do that. I can train for six hours a day and kind of get through it, but mentally you have to be really resilient. It's very stressful, and you take on a lot of pressure. It's about coping with the anxiety which comes with being in the competition. It's made me realise that just when you think you can't do any more, you can actually dig deeper and find something. Janette [Manrara, his Strictly dance partner] taught me that, which is why I think we got on so well. She was able to support me through not only the amazing bits, but also the times when I thought I couldn't do it anymore

Which was your favourite moment?

Oh, there were so many, and it's all such a blur now. I guess one of my most memorable moments was the first dance we did. It was to a Whitney song, and I'm a massive Whitney fan. It was one of my favourite Whitney songs, and we did the Cha Cha. That was the first time I'd ever done a formal dance of any sort. It went really well, and I absolutely loved it. I remember right at the end being completely knackered, as it was a full on routine, but it was such an incredible buzz. It was so great, and Janette was jumping up and down because it was the first time I'd done that routine without any mistakes. It was a really special feeling that I'll never forget.

What appeals to you most about touring with the rest of the Strictly crew?

I miss dancing so much, and I think I've become weirdly addicted. I've also missed seeing everybody because you become so close, both to the pros and the other celebs I had kind of been thinking to myself that if I didn't get on the tour, then I would definitely take up some dance lessons, so when news came through about the tour, I was absolutely blown away. It's fun. We get to do our dances again with our partners. We get to share all that time with our friends again, and we get to go on the road and meet people who are fans of the show. It's going to be one big party. It's all the good things about the show without the stress of learning new routines every week. And because it's the same show over and over again, you just get better and better and really enjoy it. With the TV show, you have such a short space of time to learn your routine. You learn a brand new style and a brand new routine in a maximum of four days. I was also trying to do all of my other jobs, so I never really got to a point where I could do the dance and just enjoy it. I'm hoping that once I'm on the tour and the dance is in my head, I can just have fun and be myself. That's what I'm really looking forward to - being able to just enjoy the dancing instead of worrying about which step comes after which.

Has your Strictly experience fuelled your desire to do more reality TV, or is that it now?

I would never say never. This has been the first reality show that I've ever been part of, and it's been a pretty special one because there's nothing like it. Probably nothing else will give me as much of a buzz, but we'll have to see what happens.

Regarding your personal life, how old were you when you realised you were gay?

I came out later in life. I was about 30. I first had to realise who I really was, and then have the confidence to be myself before I could tell everybody else. It wasn't the easiest process. Obviously some people come out earlier than that and some people a lot later, but no matter when it is or who it is, it's not easy for people, and that's why I'm a massive champion of helping people become who they are and be happy.

Was the coming-out experience easier or harder than you anticipated?

I didn't really have any expectation of what it would be like Growing up, I really didn't have any friends from the LGBTQ+ community, or any role models. That came later, when I was older. I did then meet and make a lot of friends who were gay. Up until then, I didn't have any expectations about the community or gay life because I really hadn't known it. My own experience was quite difficult and quite painful, but I really didn't have anything to compare it to. It was just what it was

What advice would you give to gay Asians who are on the brink of coming out?

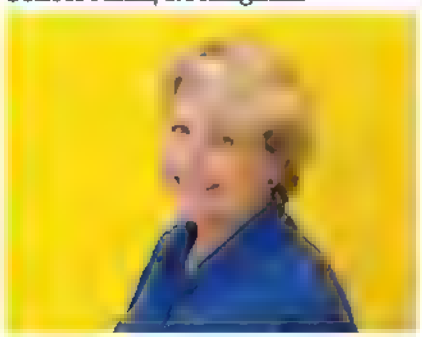
Firstly, don't be afraid to be who you are, because you have just as much right as everybody else to be happy. Secondly, if you need help, there are lots of people around who will help you and catch you afterwards. Finally, no matter how difficult it is, how painful it may be and what you might have to go through to get there, it always gets better. You will be happier for it in the end. For a lot of Gaysian people, it's a very difficult experience. There are many of us here who've been through it, have come out the other side and are much happier as a result.

Dr Ranj joins the Strictly crew when it stops off at Arena Birmingham from Fri 18 to Mon 21 January.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY IN 2019

Another fab Midlands year of comedy, theatre, music and festivals is on the cards for 2019. Here are just a few of the events that we're looking forward to checking out in the months ahead...

Sandi Toksvig Sandi's touring with her brand new one-woman comedy show, The National Trevor: Tuesday 22 January, De Montfort Hall, Leicester, Friday 1 & Saturday 2 February, Birmingham Hippodrome, Thursday 7 February, Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham



Kinky Boots With songs by Grammy and Tony-winning pop icon Cyndi Lauper, Kinky Boots takes you from a factory floor in Northampton to the glamorous catwalks of Milan: Tuesday 29 January - Saturday 9 February, Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Monday 11 - Saturday 23 March, B'ham Hippodrome

Les Misérables at Birmingham Hippodrome - Tuesday 2 April - Saturday 11 May

Julian Clary Julian brings his outrageously camp new show, Born To Mince, to the region: Tuesday 26 March, Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, Sunday 7 April, Leicester Curve, Sunday 12 May, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry and Friday 31 May, Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham

Jinkx Monsoon & Major Scales: The Ginger Snapped Wednesday 3 April, Birmingham Town Hall

Les Misérables Nearly a decade after its last sell-out UK tour, Les Mis is back in the Midlands: Tuesday 2 April - Saturday 11 May, Birmingham Hippodrome

Marc Almond Wednesday 15 May, Symphony Hall, Birmingham

Ian McKellen Sir Ian celebrates his 80th birthday with a new solo show: Saturday 20 April, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, Sunday 19 May, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, Saturday 1 & Sunday 2 June, Leicester Curve, Friday 21 & Saturday 22 June, The REP, Birmingham, Tuesday 25 & Wednesday 26 June, Nottingham Playhouse, Sunday 21 July, Royal Shakespeare Theatre and The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon

Ceri Dupree Ceri's back with The Ladies I Love tour: Saturday 27 April, Leicester Curve, Wednesday 5 - Thursday 6 June, Birmingham Hippodrome

Richard O'Brien's Rocky Horror Show The legendary rock'n'roll musical is back: Monday 13 - Saturday 25 May, The Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham, Monday 3 - Saturday 8 June, Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Wednesday 28 August - Sunday 1 September, Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, Monday 14 - Sunday 19 October, Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton

Birmingham Pride Back in 2019 with the theme of Love Out Loud: Saturday 25 & Sunday 26 May, Birmingham

Spice Girls The iconic girl group return as a touring four-piece this summer: Monday 3 June, Ricoh Arena, Coventry

Coventry Pride Saturday 8 & Sunday 9 June, Coventry

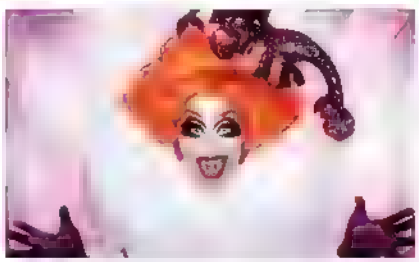
Jess Glynne at Forest Live Friday 28 June, Sherwood Pines, Nottingham & Friday 5 July, Cannock Chase, Staffs

Spice Girls at Ricoh Arena, Coventry, on Monday 3 June

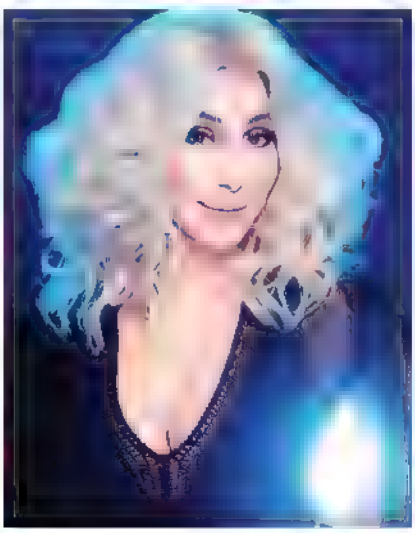
Warwickshire Pride Saturday 17 August, Pump Room Gardens, Leamington Spa

Walsall Pride Saturday 21 August, Walsall

Bianca Del Rio The RuPaul Drag Race season-six winner brings her It's Jester Joke tour to the UK: Thursday 5 September, Arena Birmingham



Cher The legend returns to the UK for her first live dates in more than 14 years: Saturday 26 October, Arena Birmingham



Eddie Izzard The comedian is back with new show Wunderbar, five years after his last tour: Tuesday 17 - Saturday 21 September, The Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham, Wednesday 9 & Thursday 10 October, Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham

Little Mix Thursday 7 - Saturday 9 November, Resorts World Arena,

We Love The 90s Christmas Show feat. Vengaboys, 2 Unlimited, Ace Of Base, Snap! Sat 14 December, Resorts World Arena

Birmingham Pride, on Saturday 25 & Sunday 26 May

What's On

Mon 24 - Mon 31 December

Happy New Year!
So long 2018, hello 2019

There's nothing like a big party to celebrate the New Year, is there?! Whether you're out with your mates or your family, there's no shortage of New Year's Eve parties to enjoy in Birmingham!
Some of the highlight get togethers include The Nightingale's, which is celebrating 50 years of business, Eden Bar's - with DJ Nikki - and The Village Inn's, where the party carries on right through till 8am. Wherever you decide to celebrate, have a great night out and an even better 2019!

Monday 31 December - Various Venues, Birmingham

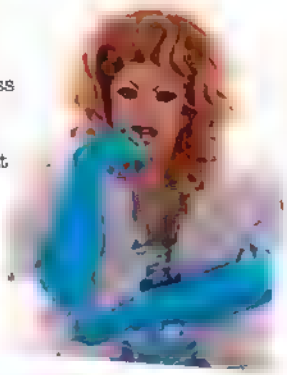
Trixie Lee
brings in the New Year at Dudley's Bar Diva!

If you're celebrating New Year's Eve in Dudley, head on down to the town's Bar Diva for a night of camp cabaret with your mates and the fabulous Trixie Lee! Make it one to remember!

Monday 31 December - Bar Diva, Dudley

Double Crimbo cabaret in Brum

Sandwiching Christmas Day, The Village Inn has live cabaret from local legends Miss Penny (on Christmas Eve) and Miss Marty (on Boxing Day). What a way to celebrate Christmas!

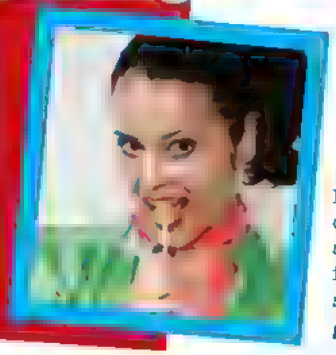


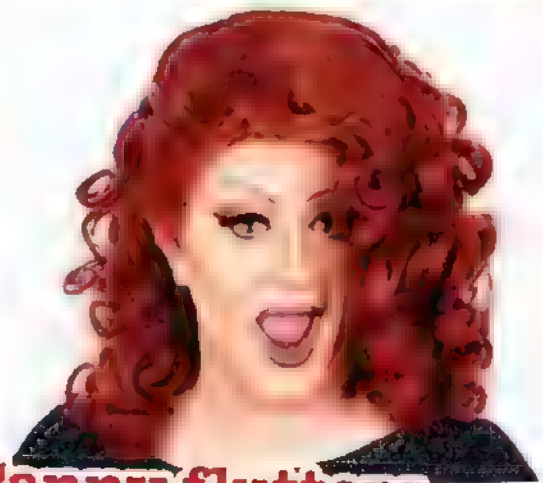
Monday 24 & Wednesday 26 December - The Village Inn, Birmingham

Hey Mickey!
NYE with Lolly

Popstar Lolly, who's best known for hit song Hey Mickey, is set to appear at The Yard in Coventry this New Year's Eve. So if you fancy seeing in 2019 while dancing to some cheesy pop, you know where to head for!

Monday 31 December - The Yard, Coventry





Fanny flutters at Brum bar

If you fancy a fun filled evening of comedy and cabaret, pop on down to Birmingham's Eden Bar and join Fanny Burns as she entertains the masses live on stage. Entry to the show is free, but best get down there in good time to secure your spot - it's sure to be a busy night!

Saturday 29 December - Eden Bar, Birmingham

What's On

Tues 1 - Sun 6 January

Inny winny let's get quizzy!

Every first Wednesday of the month sees Queeny host her very own fun filled quiz night, featuring a £150 jackpot. Plus there's a kilo of wings and a drink, or a pizza and a pint, for a tenner!

Wednesday 2 January - The Loft, Birmingham

Miss Thunderpussy kicks off 2019 at The Village Inn!

Kicking off Village Inn cabaret in 2019 is the legendary Miss Thunderpussy! If you've already got post-New Year's Eve blues, this is the perfect way to make yourself feel a whole lot better. Expect plenty of hilarity and a great singalong to boot!

Friday 4 January - The Village Inn, Birmingham

Party with Marty in Coventry

Another night not to be missed at Coventry's The Yard! The award winning gay venue is playing host to none other than Birmingham drag legend Marty Smith on the 4th of the month! It's sure to be the biggest and best party in town, so why not get yourself along, grab a drink and start 2019 as you mean to go on!

Friday 4 January - The Yard, Coventry

Sing a song with DJ Nikki at Eden!

If karaoke is your cup of tea, why not pop along to award winning Birmingham gay venue Eden Bar? Every Friday and Sunday there's karaoke with DJ Nikki - it's a fun night out!

Every Friday & Sunday - Eden Bar, Birmingham

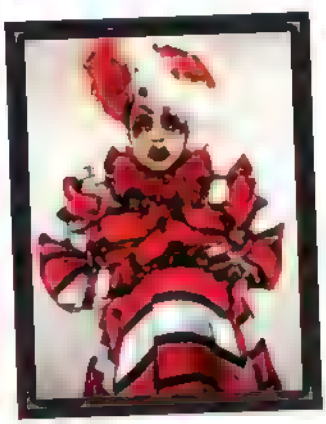
DJ Toni Lee gets the party started at Eden

If you want a good old-fashioned party night out, look no further than Birmingham's Eden Bar and their guest DJ, Toni Lee.

Playing a great selection from the current charts, party classics and all the camp'n'cheese you could possibly need, Toni promises a fun-filled night out with a fantastic atmosphere.

Saturday 5 January - Eden Bar, Birmingham

House! £120 weekly prize at Queeny's Bingo!

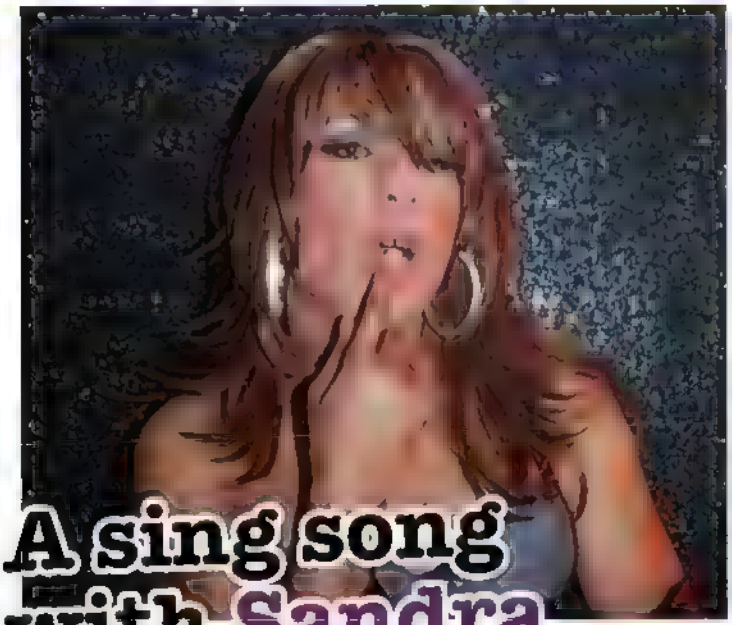


Do you love a bit of bingo, with all the excitement of waiting for that jackpot-winning final number to come out? If you do, you can experience the adrenaline rush every Monday night in the company of the incomparable Queeny. Not only is there a guaranteed weekly prize of £120, there's also new L8R Mondays to enjoy, with £1 drinks until 4am. Bingo.

Every Monday - The Village Inn, Birmingham

What's On

Mon 7 - Sun 13 January



A sing song with Sandra at The Yard

The Whore of Hampstead Heath returns to the Midlands this month to get you in the party spirit.
Performing all her favourites live on stage, Sandra will have The Yard warmed up in no time at all!

Saturday 11 January - The Yard, Coventry

A night with Tanya Hyde in Shrewsbury!

This week sees the first installment of a double cabaret bill at Shrewsbury's Havana Republic. First up at the popular venue, which dedicates every Monday night to the LGBT+ community, is the ever-sensational Tanya Hyde! And not only that, there's also a great party atmosphere to enjoy, courtesy of your host and DJ, Miss Penny!

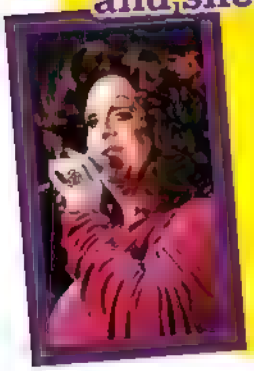
Monday 7 January - Havana Republic, Shrewsbury

Time to get Pounded at The Nightingale!

Who doesn't love £1 drinks? We certainly do, and we're sure you do too - so head down to The Nightingale every Thursday for a fantastic and pleasingly cheap night out!

Every Thursday - The Nightingale, Birmingham

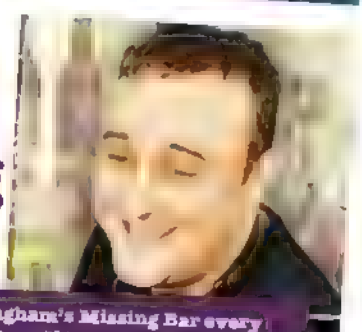
Her name is Lola and she's live in Brum!



Can you believe we're already nearly halfway through January? No, neither can we! But what we *can* believe is that Lola Lasagne will be putting on an amazing show at Birmingham's Village Inn! Lola's a real crowd pleaser, so if you haven't seen her show before, be sure to pop down for what's certain to be a wild'n'crazy night!

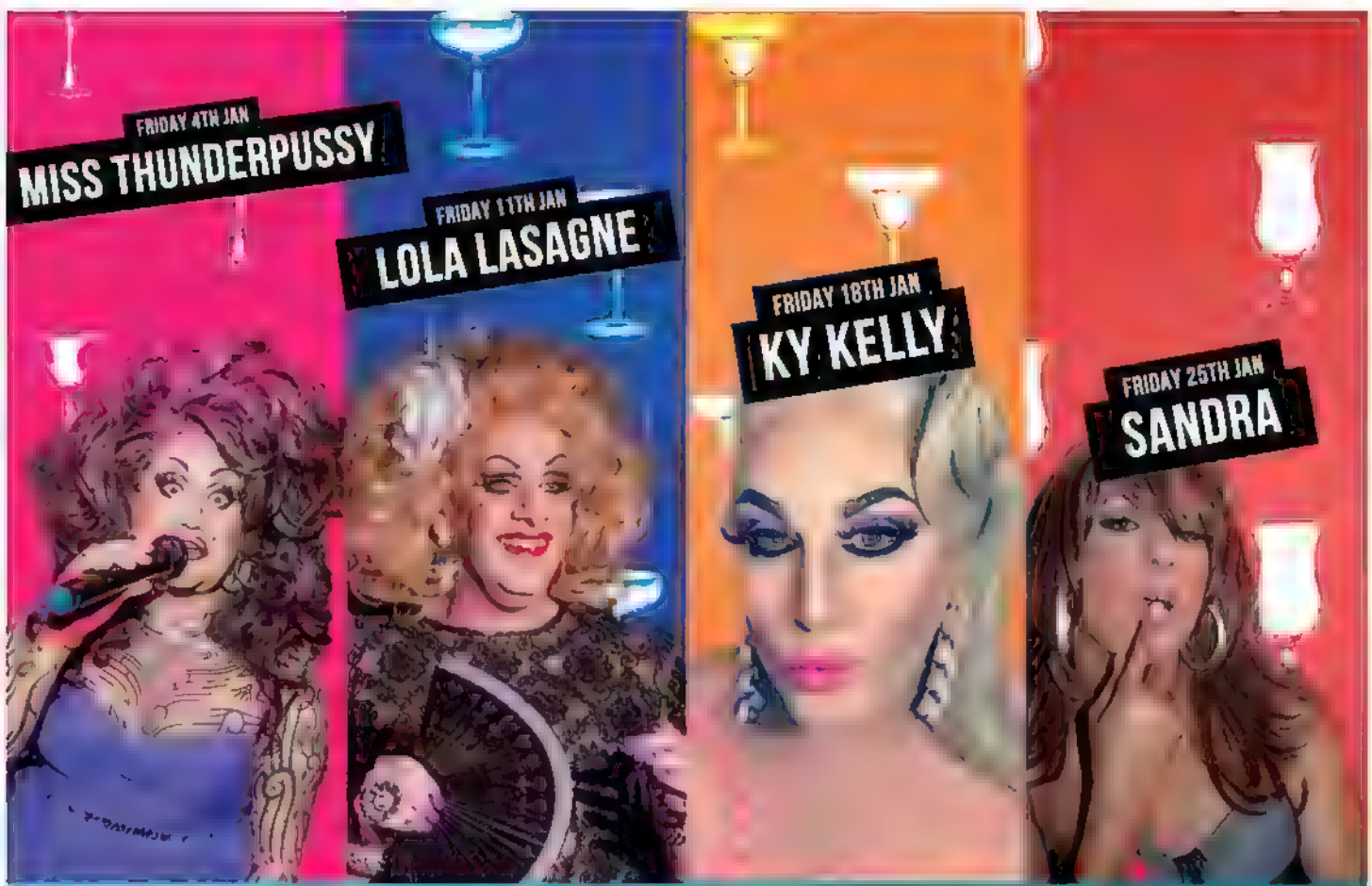
Friday 11 January - The Village Inn, Birmingham

Ministry of Pound at Missing Bar!



Join DJ Mike Emery at Birmingham's Missing Bar every Monday night for Ministry of Pound! Not only will Mike be spinning the biggest and best tunes, the bar staff will also be serving up £1 DRINKS! Yes! One. Pound. Drinks!

Every Monday - Missing Bar, Birmingham



MONDAYS

£120

TUESDAYS

PICK N MIX
WITH
BLANCHE

WEDNESDAYS

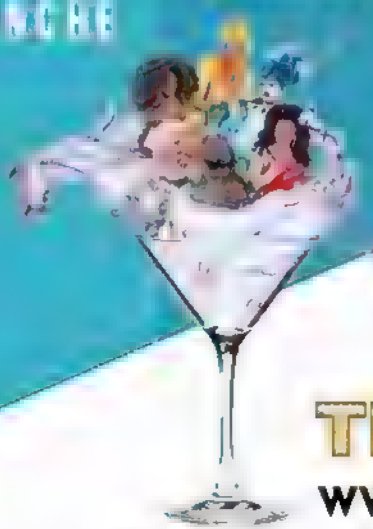
KARAOKE
WITH
CHARLOTTE THE HARLOTTE

THURSDAYS

MISS MARTY
MISS PENNY

SUNDAYS

YSHEE
BLACK ++



JANUARY CABARET

THE VILLAGE INN

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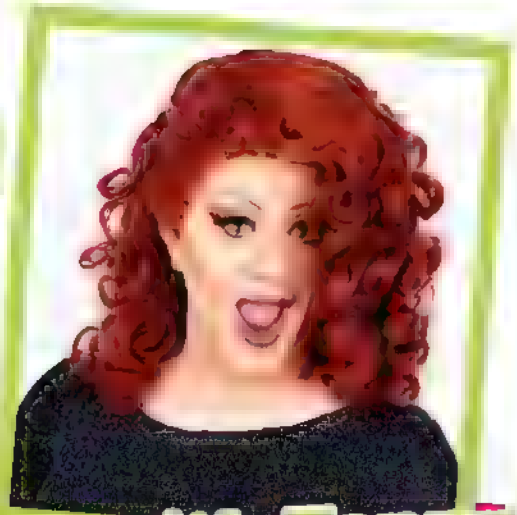
What's On

Mon 14 - Sun 20 January

Hey Mr DJ! A night dedicated to Madonna

If you're a fan of Madonna (and let's face it, who isn't?), then head to The Loft in Birmingham on Saturday the 19th to enjoy an evening of top-quality Madge tracks!

Saturday 19 January - The Loft, Birmingham



Fun with Jeanny in Birmingham

Saturday 19 January Eden Bar Birmingham

Leather Social at Birmingham's Eden

If you love wearing leather, or are simply an admirer of other men who do, then make sure you pop along to Birmingham's Eden Bar this month for the regular Leather Social event. It's full of likeminded men who'll be showing off their very best gear.

Sunday 20 January - Eden Bar, Birmingham

KY Kelly at The Village Inn!

Another Friday, another night of cracking cabaret at The Village Inn. This week, it's the fabulous KY Kelly!

Friday 18 January - The Village Inn, Birmingham

It's party time with Lisa Q Jones in Dudley!

Head on over to Bar Diva in Dudley this month for a night out with the fantastic and fabulous Lisa Q Jones!
An evening of fun, games, laughter and singing is a guarantee, so be sure not to miss it! **Saturday 19 January - Bar Diva, Dudley**

MISS PENNY'S

FABULOUS MONDAYS!

DJ
CABARET
& HOST

THE BIGGEST GAY MONDAY NIGHT IN THE MIDLANDS!

FREE ENTRY ALL NIGHT! - OPEN UNTIL 4AM! - GREAT £1 DRINKS ALL NIGHT!

SPIRIT
SHREWSBURY

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[illegible] SHROPSHIRE SY2 6AE TEL 01743 271821

What's On

Mon 21 - Thurs 31 January

NYE Re-run with Mabel at The Nightingale

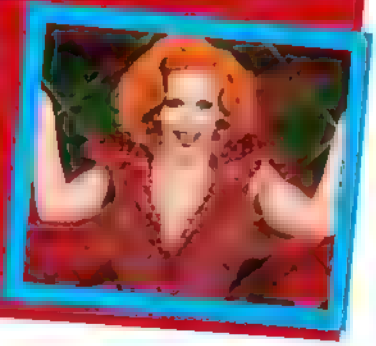
Pop star Mabel will be live on stage as The Nightingale hosts its annual New Year's Eve Re-run event!
The Swedish singer-songwriter, best known for top-10 single Finders Keepers, will be performing a selection of hits on the night, including Ring Ring, My Lover and Fine Line. Check her out!

Saturday 26 January - The Nightingale, Birmingham

Mary Mac is back at Eden Bar!

Scottish drag queen Mary Mac heads to Birmingham's Eden Bar for her regular time to shine at the end of the month! She'll be joined by DJ Toni Lee for a night of glorious fun in a fantastic party atmosphere.

Saturday 26 January - Eden Bar, Birmingham



Son Of A Tutu gets sent to Coventry

Wrapping up an action-packed month of entertainment at The Yard is Drag Idol winner Son Of A Tutu, who'll be providing plenty of entertainment for the Coventry crowd to enjoy!

Friday 25 January - The Yard, Coventry

Get your gay on with Mary Golds

Making her debut at Shrewsbury's popular Havana Republic venue is Mary Golds, who'll be taking to the stage to entertain the town's LGBT community. Great drinks offers, party tunes and a fantastic atmosphere add to the magic. Enjoy!

Monday 21 January - Havana Republic, Shrewsbury

Showtime with Alfie & LaQueefa

Join Amy LaQueefa and Alfie Ordinary for Missing Bar's very own New Year's Eve Re-run Hangover! That's right - the night after DJ Mike Emery's NYE Re-run at the venue, Alfie and Amy will be on hand with a double bill showtime. Join them at 9pm and 10.30pm!

Sunday 27 January - Missing Bar, Birmingham

QUIZZICAL!
The smartphone
QUIZ
WEDNESDAYS 8PM
WITH DJ YOGI
SpeedQuizzing
KARAOKE & DISCO
EVERY FRIDAY & SUNDAY
WITH DJ NIKKI
JANUARY
eden
SAT 5th DJ TONI LEE
SUN 6th DJ NIKKI
FRI 18th MIDSBEARS
SAT 19th FANNY BURNS
SUN 20th LEATHER SOCIAL
SAT 26th CLUB SCRITCHES
Sat. Afternoon clubscritches.co.uk
SAT 26th MARY MAC
Open from 2pm Every Day | 116 Sherlock St. Birmingham, B5 6NB | End of Hurst Street | 0121 622 1953 | www.TheEdenBar.co.uk

NYE RE RUN SAT 26TH
WITH DJ MIKE EMERY
THE NYE RE RUN
HANGOVER!
WITH ALFIE ORDINARY & AMY LAQUEEFA
Missing
SUNDAY 27TH JANUARY SHOWTIME 9PM & 10.30PM

What's On

Beautiful Boy

Based on the bestselling dual memoirs of a father and son, Beautiful Boy is the story of a strained relationship, as the latter deals with his addiction to crystal meth.
Starring Call Me By Your Name actor Timothée Chalamet in the main role and Steve Carell as the father, the film chronicles the heartbreaking and inspiring experience of survival, relapse, and recovery. From the Belgian director of the Oscar-nominated The Broken Circle Breakdown (2012)

On general release Friday 18 January

Fame The Musical

Grab those leg warmers and slip on your dancing shoes - Fame The Musical is out on tour and heading to the Midlands!
Based on the smash-hit 1980 movie, the show follows the lives of students at New York's High School for the Performing Arts as they navigate their way through the highs and lows of life.
This 30th anniversary touring show stars Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat's Keith Jack, singer Mica Paris and Hollyoaks' Jorgie Porter

Monday 28 January - Saturday 2 February, Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury

The Alex Film Festival

Ugh! As if it's January, it's dark, it's cold, and it seems like forever since we last got paid - we're totally buggin'.
Yet can beat those January blues by heading to Birmingham's Alexandra Theatre to enjoy a week-long film festival.
Highlights include quote-along and dress-up screenings of '90s classic Clueless, the iconic Spiceworld movie, and one of the most quotable films of all time - Mean Girls.
And best of all, they're all free - that's 80 bob!

Monday 14 - Sunday 20 January, The Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham

Colette

After marrying a successful Parisian writer known commonly as 'Willy', Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette (Keira Knightley) moves from her childhood home in rural France to the intellectual and artistic splendour of Paris.
Soon after, Willy convinces Colette to ghost-write for him. She pens a semi-autobiographical novel about a witty and brazen country girl named Claudine, sparking a bestseller and a cultural sensation. After its success, Colette and Willy become the talk of Paris, and their adventures inspire additional Claudine novels.
Colette's fight over creative ownership and gender roles drives her to overcome societal constraints, in the process revolutionising literature, fashion and sexual expression.

On general release Friday 11 January

CupcakKe

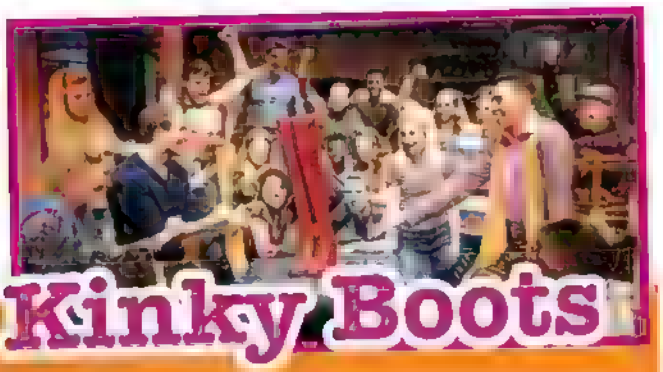
Originating in Chicago, rapper/singer CupcakKe returns to the UK to promote fourth album Eden. CupcakKe burst onto the scene in 2015 with online breakthrough tracks Deepthroat and Vagina, releasing debut album Audacious to great critical acclaim the following year. Second studio offering Queen Elizabitch followed in 2017, before she banged out not one but two albums last year.
A strong advocate for LGBT rights, she's sure to be playing to a sell-out crowd when she stops off in Birmingham this month.

Monday 7 January, The Asylum, Birmingham

Strictly Come Dancing Live

Anything with glitter, leather boas and a whole lot of camp, we're going to be there.
The Strictly Come Dancing Live walking back onto the road this month with a supersized and sequin-filled show.
Strictly favourite and 2016 winner Ore Oduba hosts the tour for a second time, with all four TV judges – Craig Revel Horwood, Bruno Tonioli, Darcey Bussell and Shirley Ballas – further adding to the glitz and glamour.
Audiences can expect a host of breathtaking dance routines recreating the magic of the hit TV series live on stage.
Stacey Dooley, Dr Ranj Singh and Joe Sugg are among the celebrities hitting the dancefloor.

Friday 18 – Monday 21 January, Arena Birmingham



Kinky Boots

The award winning Kinky Boots visits the Midlands this month on its first ever UK tour
Inspired by true events and featuring songs by pop icon Cyndi Lauper, the show takes its audience from a gentlemen's shoe factory in Northampton to the glamorous catwalks of Milan.
Charlie Price is struggling to live up to his father's expectation that he'll continue the family shoe-making business. With the factory's future hanging in the balance, help arrives in the unlikely but spectacular form of Lola, a fabulous performer in need of some sturdy new stilettos...
Callum Francis pulls on the boots to play Lola following his award winning performance in the role in Australia. He's joined by Coronation Street's Paula Lane and West End star Joel Harper-Jackson, who plays Charlie

Monday 28 January - Saturday 9 February, Regent Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent

The Circus Of Horrors

Next year celebrating a quarter-century on the road, The Circus Of Horrors this month returns with brand new show Psycho Asylum.
The one-time Britain's Got Talent finalists present a world beyond political correctness and taste, with the performers dressed in a manner reminiscent of The Rocky Horror Show.
Giving a nod to one of Circus Of Horror's previous and most popular productions - The Asylum - this latest offering takes place in the dubious company of the deranged serial killers inhabiting the Psycho Ward...

Thursday 10 January, The Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham; Tuesday 15 January, Belgrade Theatre, Coventry; Thursday 17 January, Victoria Hall, Stoke-on-Trent

The return of the ‘gay Swan Lake’

Matthew Bourne next month brings his New Adventures company back to Birmingham with an updated version of his iconic masterpiece, Swan Lake, in which the female corps-de-ballet is replaced by a menacing male ensemble...

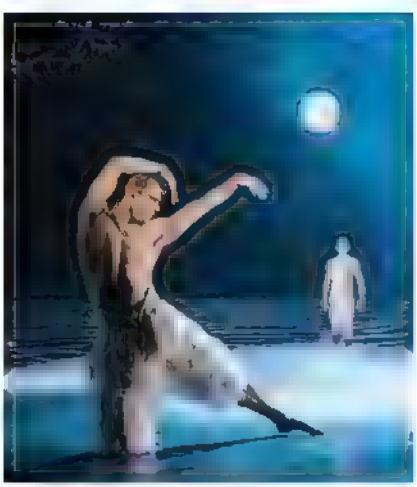
Originally staged in 1995 to great critical acclaim, Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake is presented by his company, New Adventures, and remarkably features an all-male corps-de-ballet.

"We're a contemporary dance theatre company," says Bourne, "so we had to tell a story through movement in a different way, and it needed a big idea to make people see it in a different way as well.

"The male swans were the big idea, and a secondary big idea was modern royal scandal. This was in the news all the time whilst we were making the piece, with Diana & Charles, and Sarah Ferguson, and Camilla Parker-Bowles, and Princess Margaret. All of these people were daily news during the making of the show. And so it was a very topical thing to have a prince who couldn't be the person he really was, and couldn't be with the person he wanted to be with. It was all very relevant to contemporary Britain and contemporary royalty. So we're still telling the same story - it's still about a royal family, but a modern royal family.

"I thought that would be picked up on quite a lot when the show was first seen, but actually the attention was much more on the use of the male swans. A male dancing swan was such an iconic image. It was very unexpected, and people couldn't imagine what it was going to look like. They all thought it was going to be a send up and a humorous piece. There is a bit of humour in it, but the main bulk of it isn't. We needed an idea that could wipe away everyone's existing perceptions of the ballet, and the male swans did that very well.

"It got dubbed 'the gay Swan Lake', which was not what the aim was, but there was certainly a story within it that was very meaningful for gay audiences, and I celebrate that. I did then, and I do now. It's a bit more wide-ranging than that, however, and it can really be interpreted in many ways.



"It's accepted now by a much wider audience, who come to see the show and, rather than be shocked by any element of it, find it uplifting that this is a story being told about a young man who's confused about his future and his sexuality. I think that's something which is very meaningful for young people in the audience as well."

Although reworked, the 2019 Swan Lake's staging won't be too far removed from the original.

"Many people seeing the new version of Swan Lake probably won't recognise many of the changes we've made, and I think they will feel they're still seeing the same piece. We will know, however, that we've made hundreds of little changes. The changes won't be so big that people think, 'Oh, what did you do that for?' or 'Why did you lose that great idea?'. Maybe there will be one or two things that big fans of the show will feel the loss of, but generally speaking I think we're celebrating the piece that already exists.

"We have a new lighting designer, Paule Constable, as one of our associates for the piece. Paule has never seen our Swan Lake before - not on film or on stage - so we'll get a completely fresh approach from her, and I don't know what it will look like yet. It's definitely going to look different, as Paule's a different kind of designer, so that will be a big change

"We've got a completely new cast as well. There are lots of new dancers who will bring their own interpretations to the piece - as they do with all our shows - and that keeps the work fresh and alive.

"I certainly don't think audiences who already love our Swan Lake will be in any way disappointed."

Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake shows at Birmingham Hippodrome from Tuesday 5 to Saturday 16 February

Friday 25th January 2019

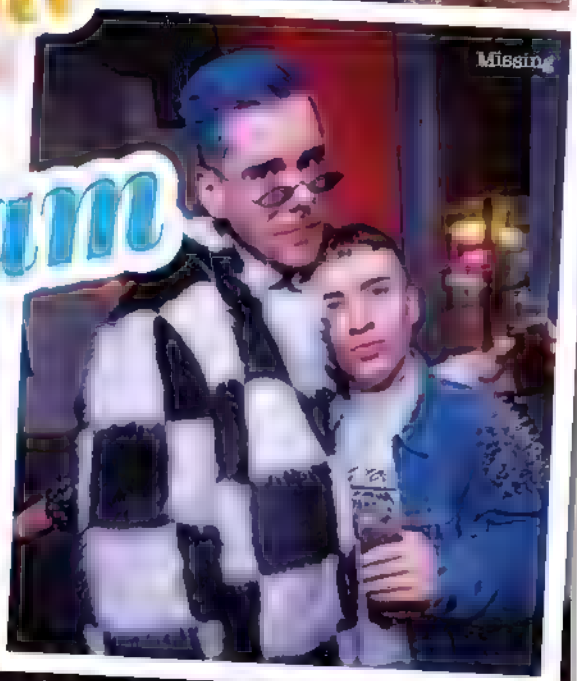
'Shelton as Sinatra is simply phenomenal'
'Marvellously played'
'Best Actor in a Leading Role' nominee for playing Frank
SHELTON SINATRA
RAW
a new play by Richard Shelton
23rd - 26th January 2019
Theatre
Box Office 0121 200 1882
oldjointstock.co.uk

A TRIBUTE TO
MADONNA
SATURDAY
19TH
JANUARY
the Loft

The Nightingale

The Fox

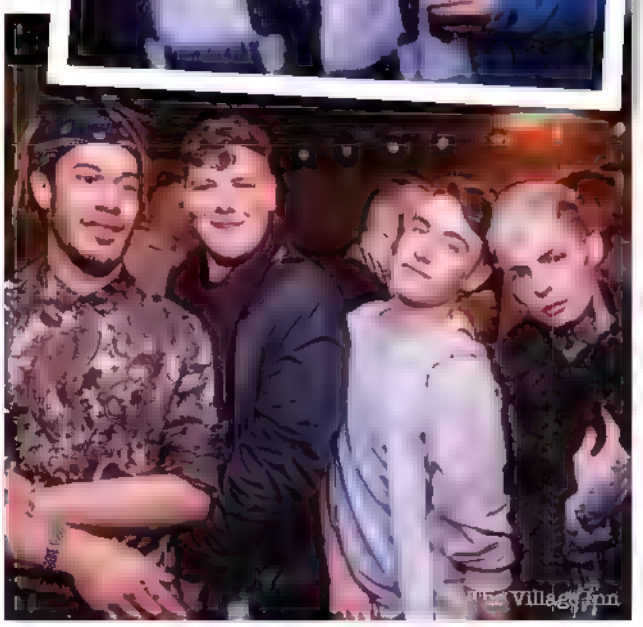
Party all night in vibrant Birmingham


Missing

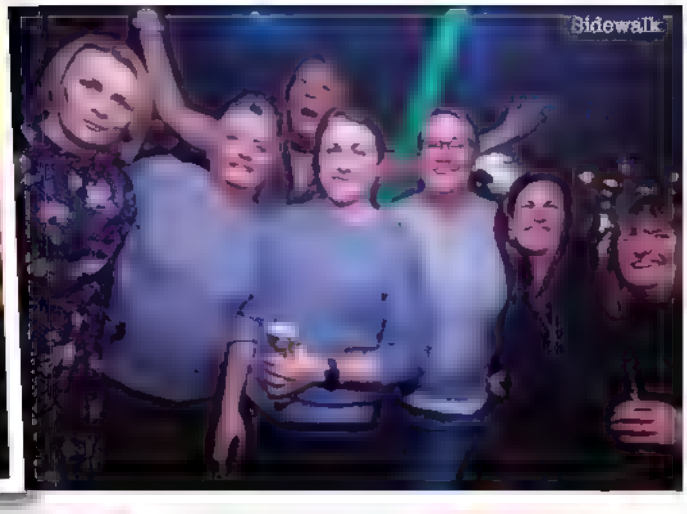
If you're out for the night in Birmingham, then the city's gay scene is a great place to be!

With over 15 bars and clubs to choose from, there really is something for everyone! It's a truly fab night out!

Missing

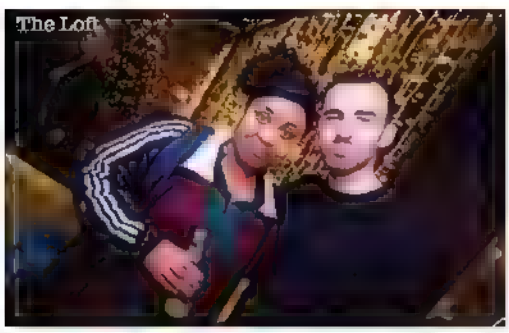

The Village Inn

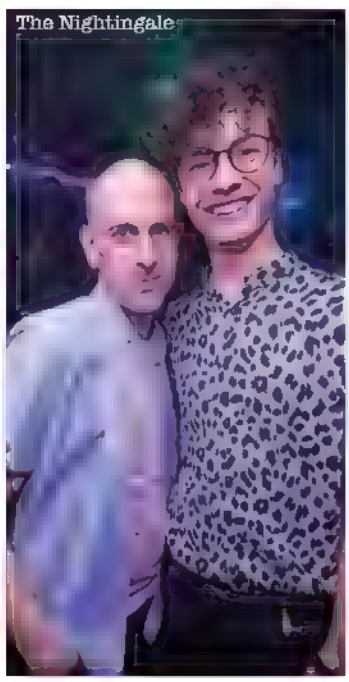
The Village Inn

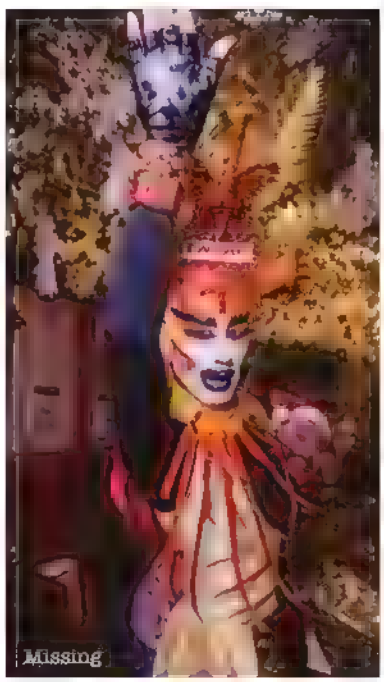

Sidewalk

Missing

Eden


The Loft


The Nightingale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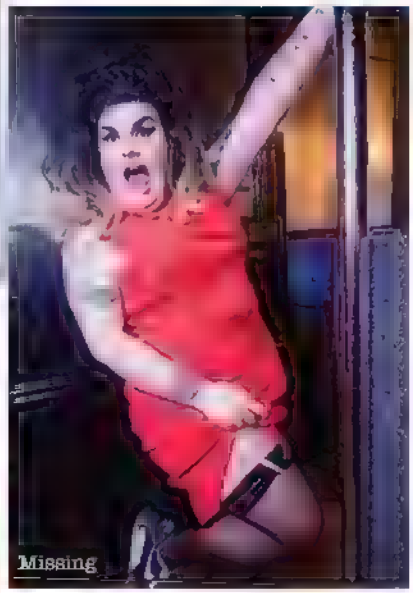
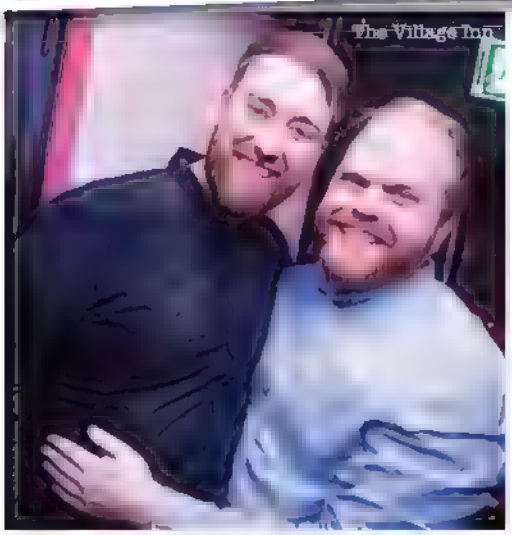
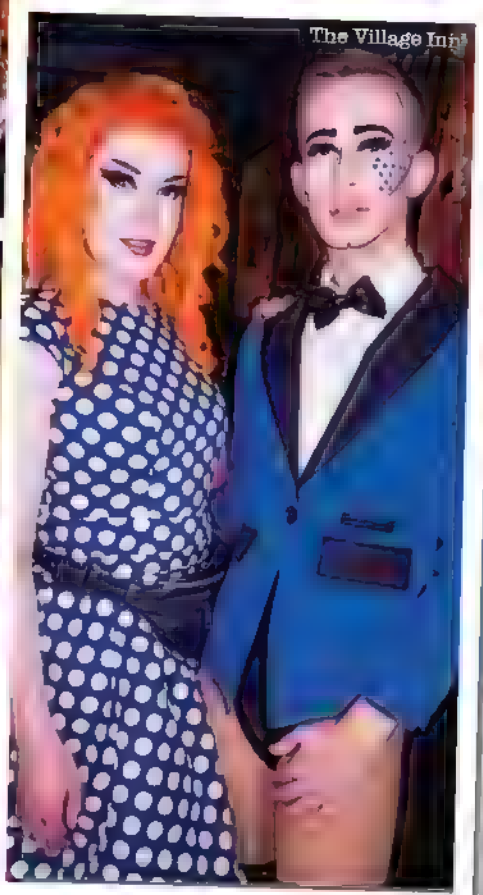
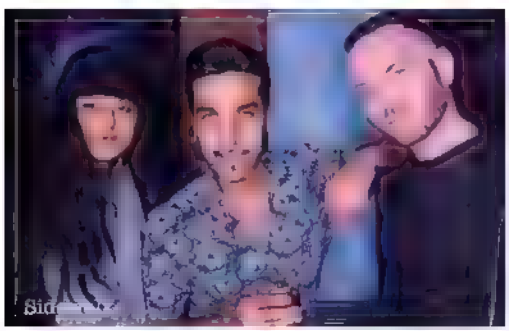
The Village Inn

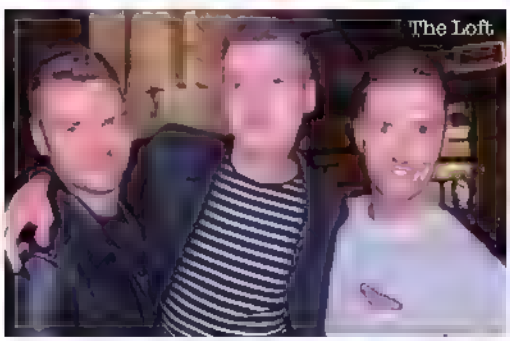
Party all night in vibrant Birmingham

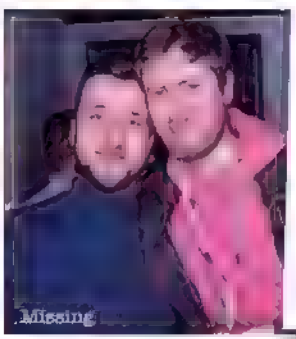












Eden

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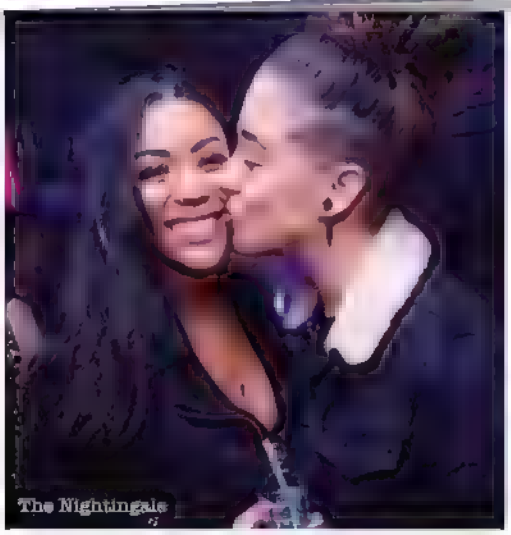
The Nightingale

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The Village Inn

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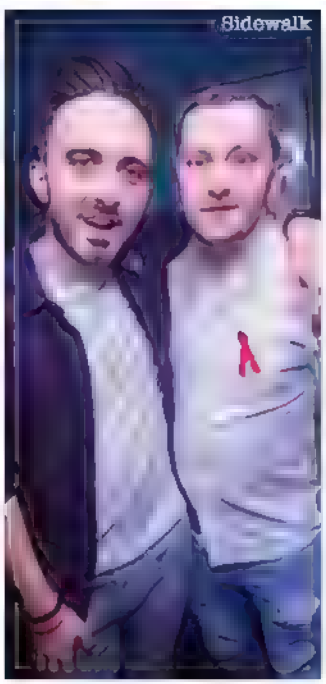
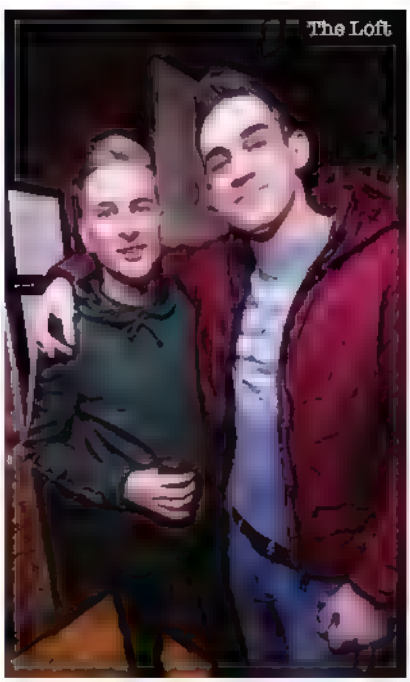
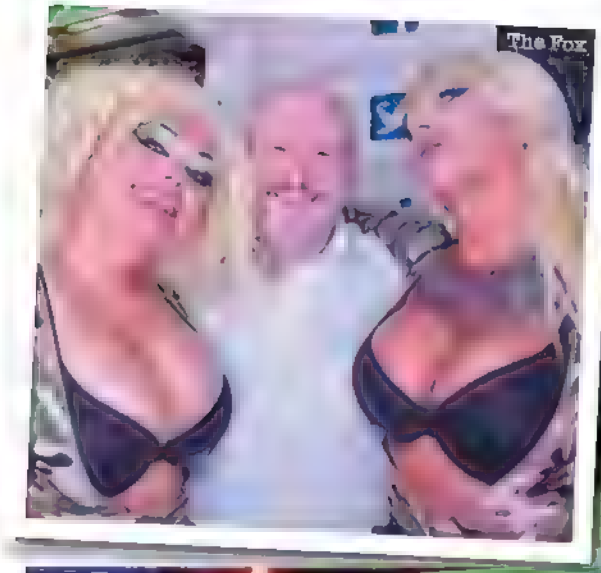
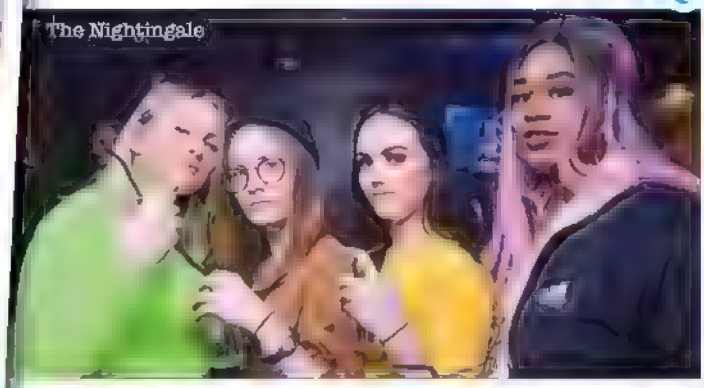
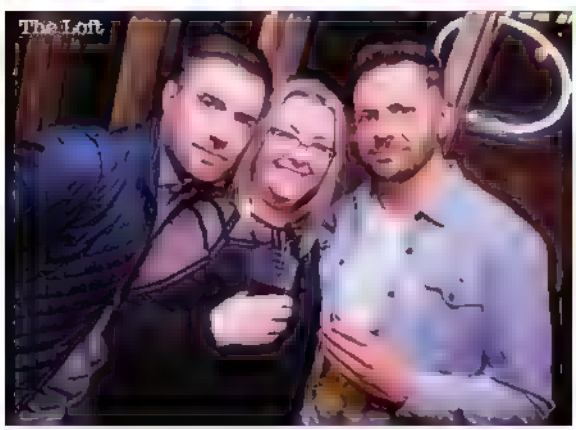

Sidewalk

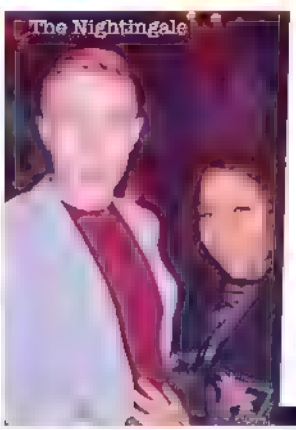

The Loft

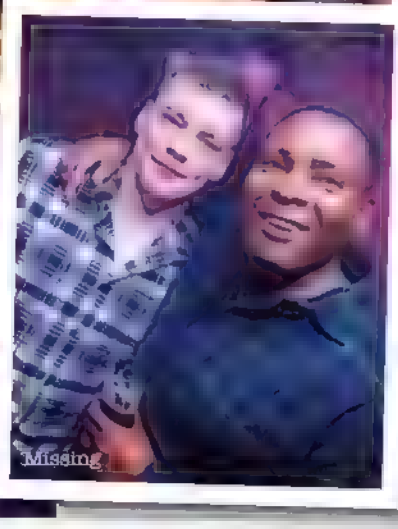
Party all night in vibrant Birmingham

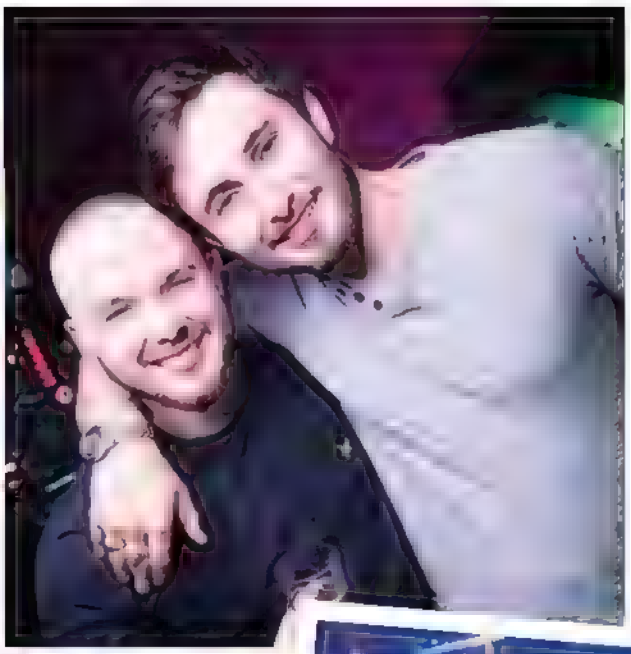








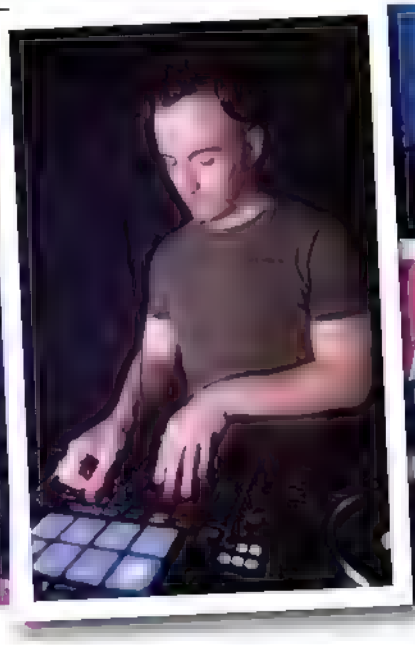


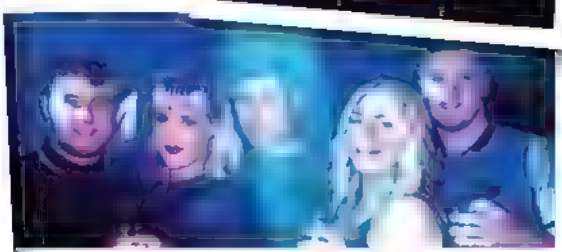


Show off your Ego at Gorgeous Wolverhampton

Every Saturday at Gorgeous in Wolverhampton, immerse yourself in Ego - one of the city's busiest club nights - from 11pm till 6am.

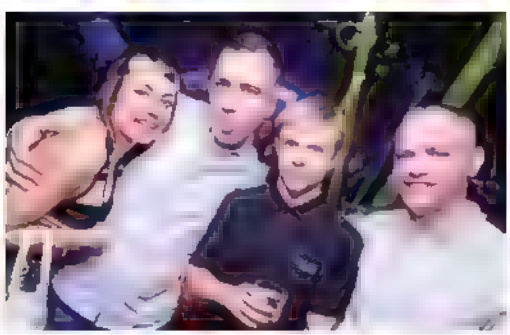
The gay venue also offers 'the happiest two hours' in Wolverhampton, as you can get free entry, 50p Sourz shots, £1 spirits and £2 bottles between 11pm and 1am.

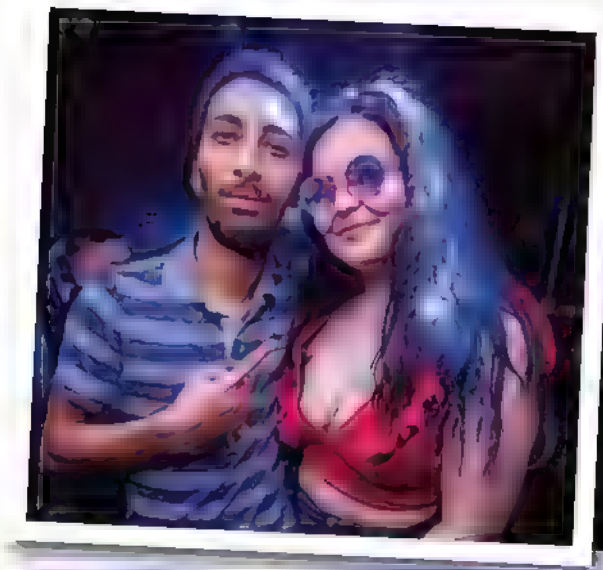


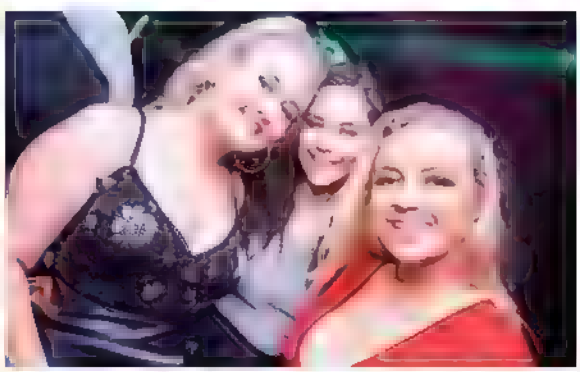


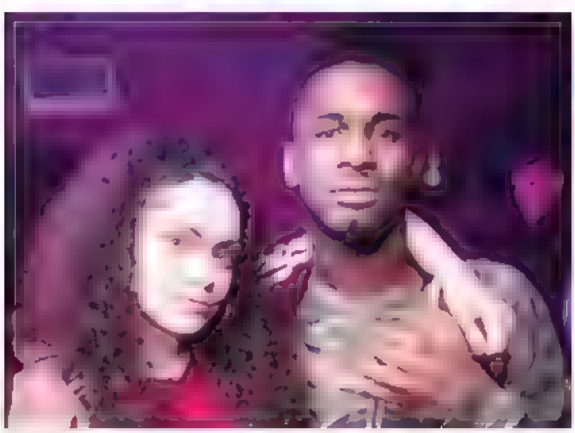
Pictures by Laura Byrne

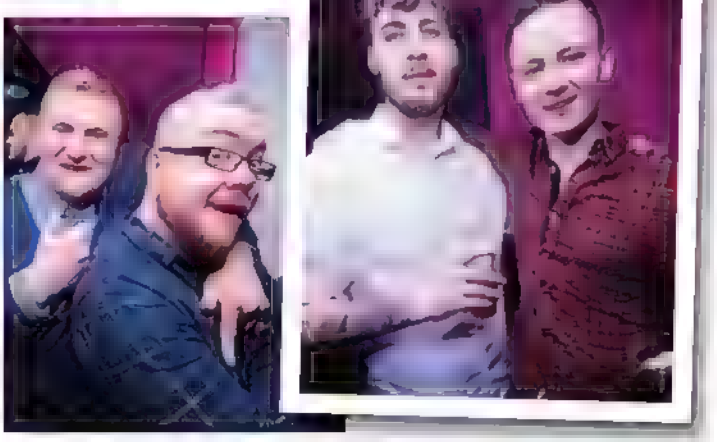
HUGO











gorgeous

THURSDAY 1-6AM | FRIDAY & SATURDAY 11PM-6AM

2 BARS | VIP BOOTHS | VIP LOUNGE

KEEPING WOLVERHAMPTON OUT!

OFFICIALLY THE MIDLANDS BEST GAY NIGHTCLUB! (MIDLANDS ZONE AWARDS)

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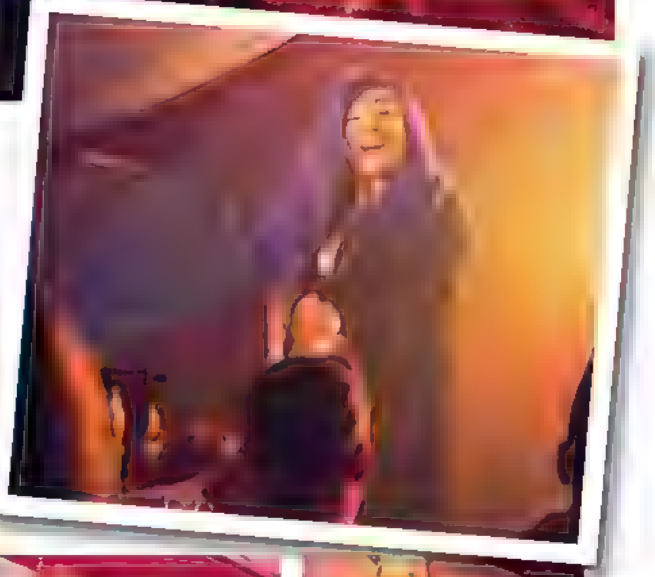
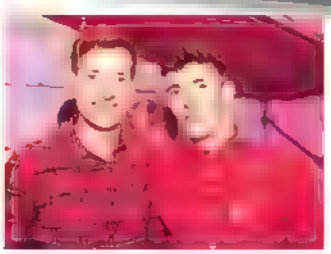
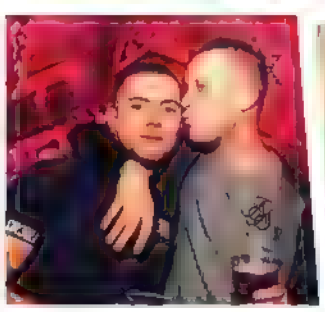
It's a great night out at The Yard

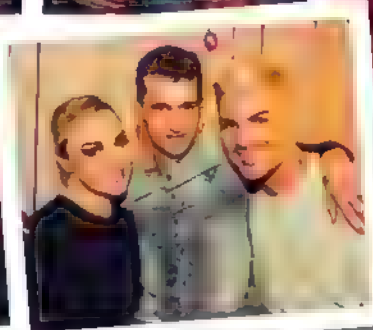
It's been another bumper month at The Yard, Coventry's award-winning gay bar & club...

The venue's fantastic Snow Ball Street Party featured, among others, Platnum, Marcella Woods, Thunderpussy, Jade Justine, The Saturnos and headlining Sugababe Mutya Buena. Kieron Richardson and Georgie Porter from Hollyoaks hosted the event, and needless to say a good time was had by all!

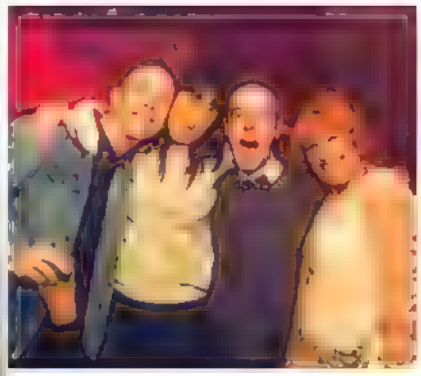
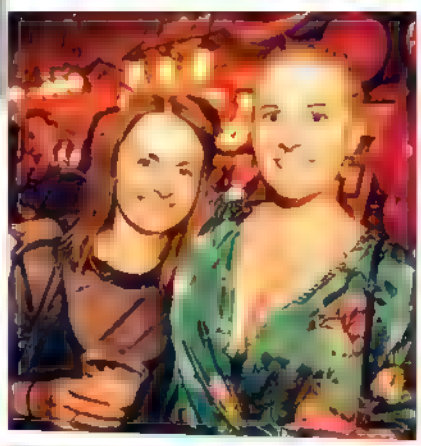


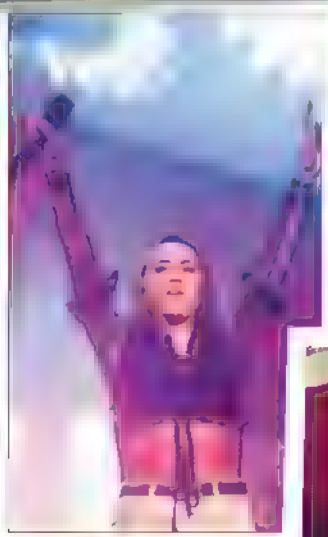


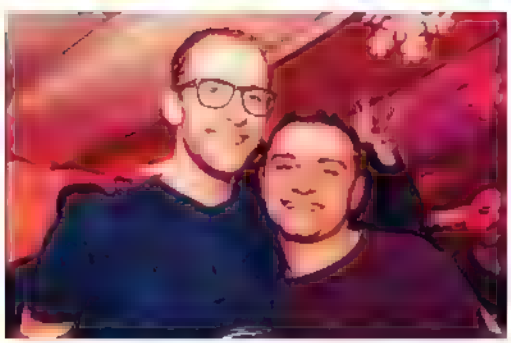
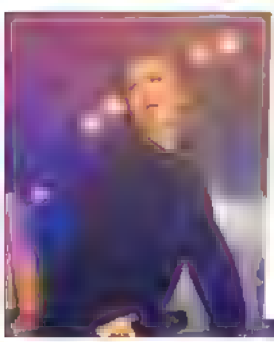




Pictures by The Yard



the yard

JANUARY

HAPPY NEW YEAR

FRIDAY 4TH MISS MARTY

FRIDAY 11TH SANDRA

FRIDAY 18TH MARY COLOS

FRIDAY 25TH SON OFA TUTU

TUESDAY
Quiz

WEDNESDAY
OPEN MIC

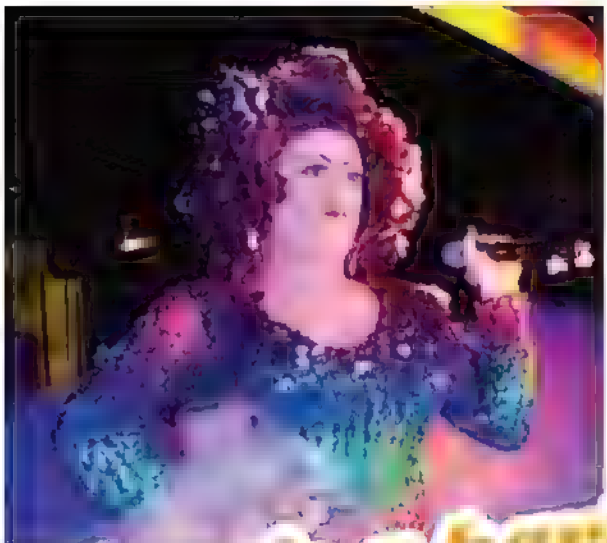
PARTY NIGHT

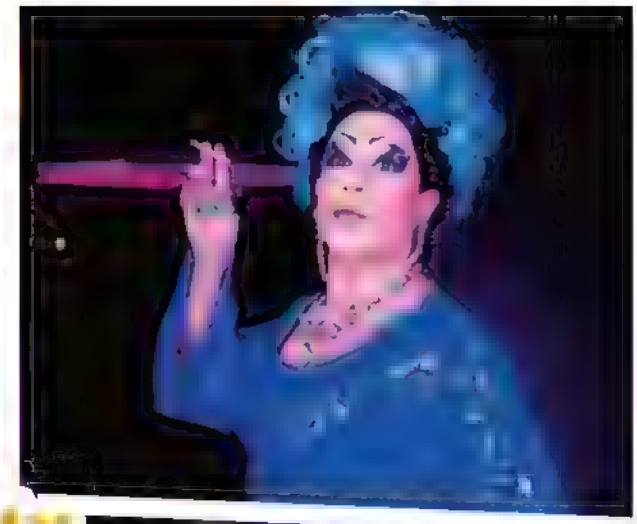
THURSDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY

THE YARD, 11-12 BULL YARD, COVENTRY, CV1 1LH WWW.THEYARDCOVENTRY.CO.UK

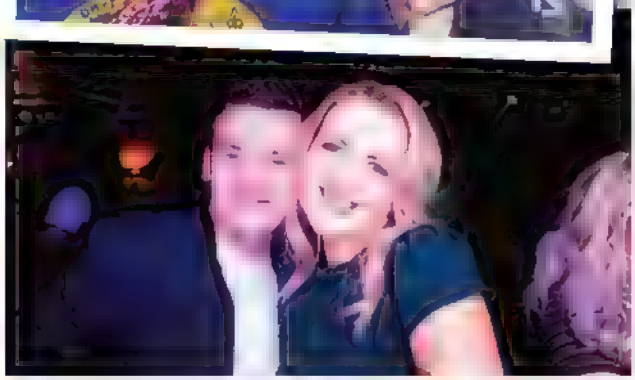


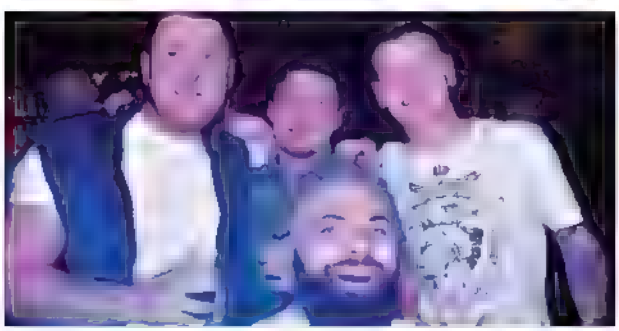


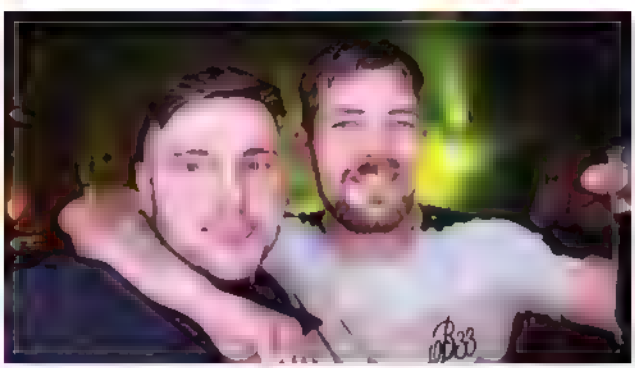
There's a party to be had at Bar Diva

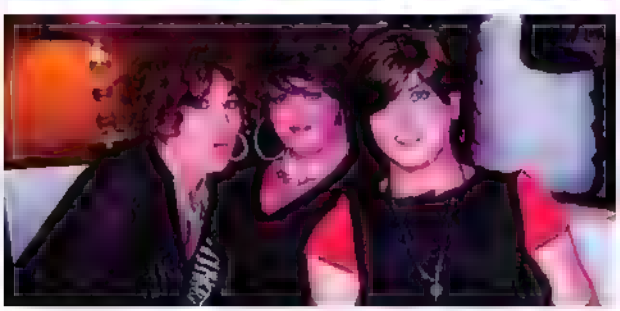
Fancy partying somewhere a bit different? Then head for Bar Diva in Dudley!

A good laugh, great drinks offers and a fantastic atmosphere are pretty much guaranteed when you visit the popular venue, so get set for a night to remember!

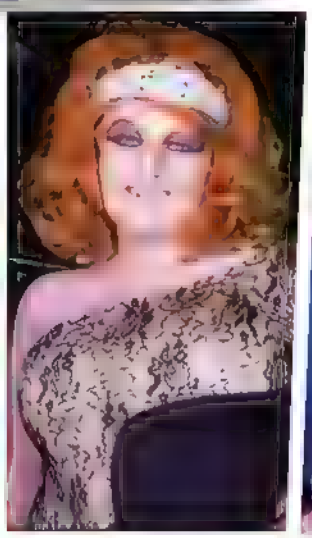
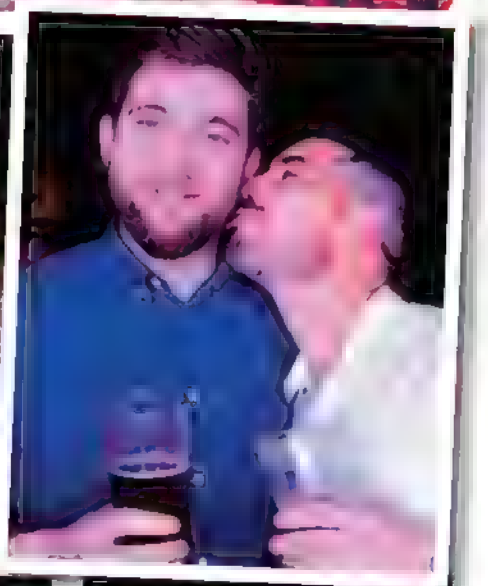
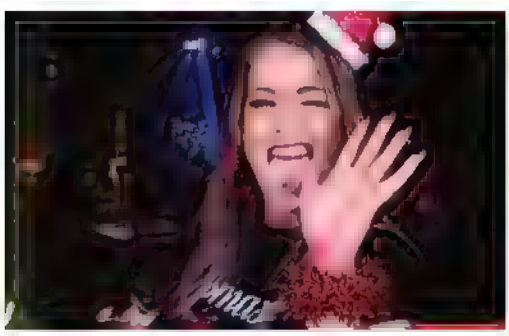
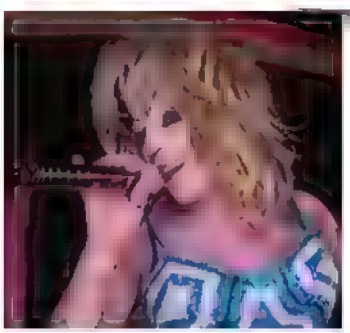
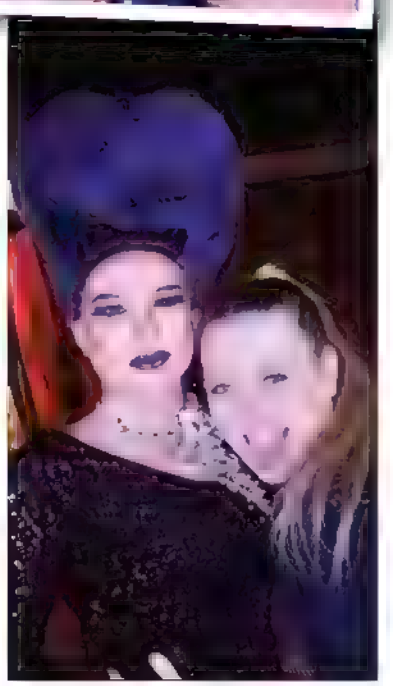
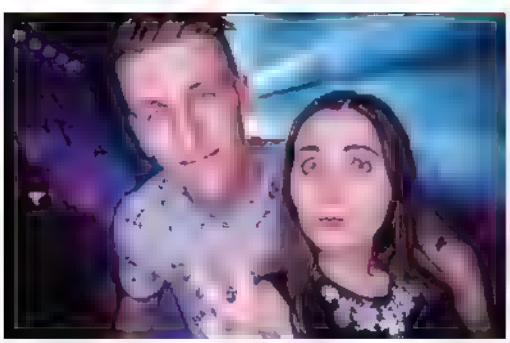
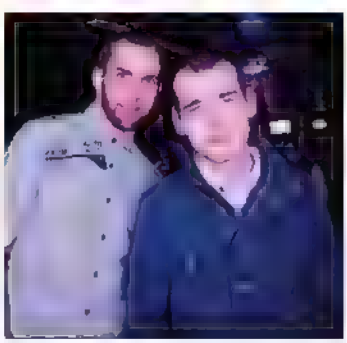


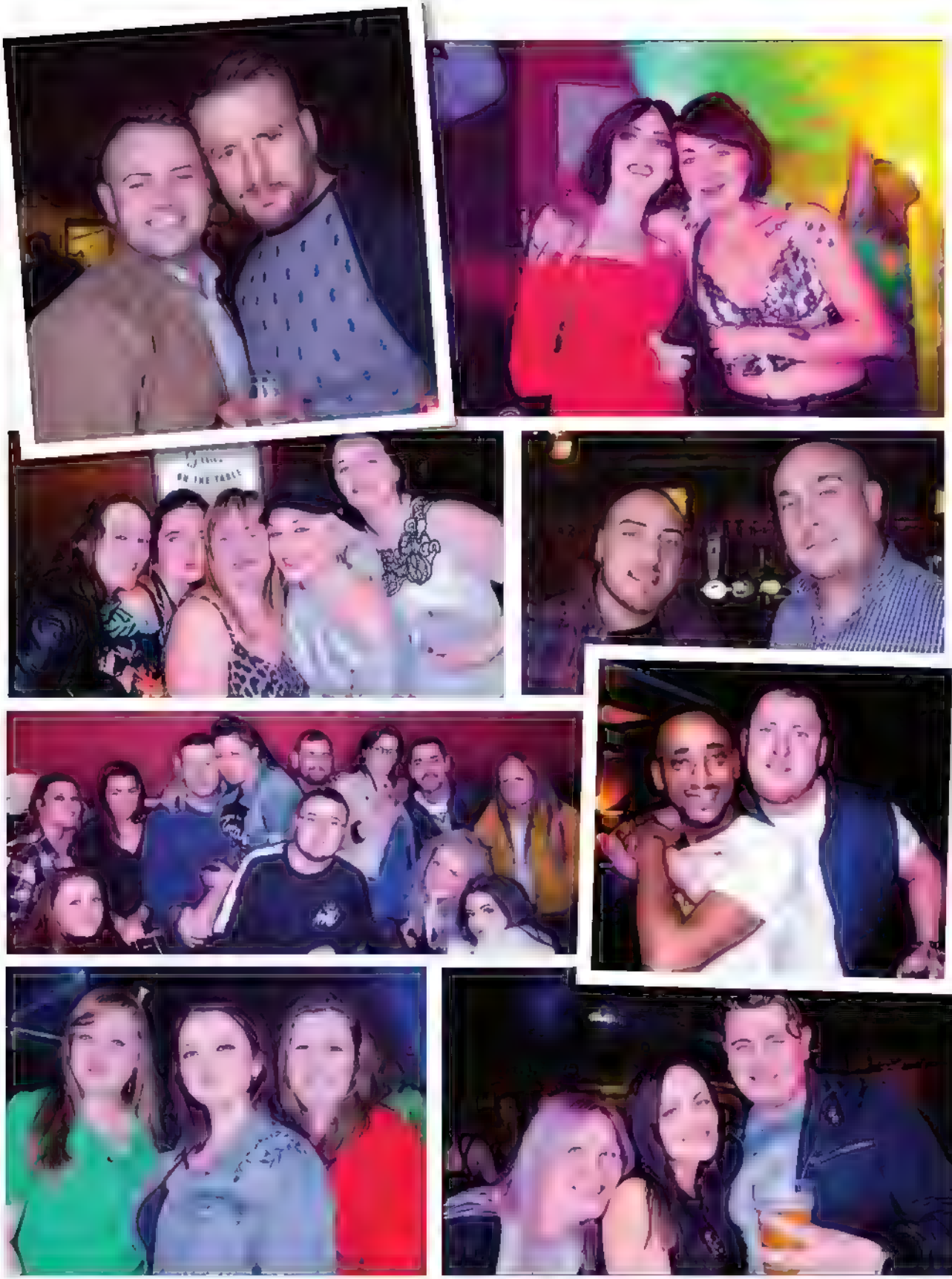






Pictures by Laura Byrne



SATURDAY 2ND FEBRUARY

FOAM PARTY

19TH JANUARY
LISA Q JONES

BAR DIVA!

Lower Plaza Mall King Street
DY2 8NZ Dudley

AWARD WINNER

/BarDivaThePlaceToBe

GAY BARS & CLUBS IN THE MIDLANDS...

Birmingham

BAR JESTER
Holloway Circus, B1 1EG
Tel: 0121 643 8344

BOLTZ CLUB
Lower Essex St, B5 6QP
Tel: 0121 666 6888

CLUB CHIC
28 Horsefair, B11DD
Tel: 0121 666 6806

THE CORE
Sherlock St, B5 6NB
Tel: 0121 622 2797

DEVILS KITCHEN
Kent St, B5 6NB

EDEN BAR
Sherlock St, B5 6NB
Tel: 0121 622 1953
www.theedenbar.co.uk
/eden.bar

FOUNTAIN INN
Wrentham St, B5 6QL
Tel: 0121 622 1452

THE FOX
17 Lower Essex St,
B5 6SN Tel: 0121 622 3213

GLAMOROUS
27-35 Hurst St, B5 4BD
Tel: 0121 622 5912

THE LOFT
12 Bromsgrove St,
B5 6RG
Tel: 0121 6222 444
www.theloftlounge.co.uk
/The-Loft-Lounge

MISSING BAR
Hurst St, B5 6NU
Tel: 0121 622 4256
www.missingbar.co.uk
/missingbar

THE NIGHTINGALE
Kent St, B5 6RD
Tel: 0121 622 1718
www.nightingaleclub.co.uk
/thenightingaleclub

SIDEWALK
Hurst Street, B5 6SE
Tel: 0121 666 6220

THE VILLAGE INN
Hurst St, B5 4BD
Tel: 0121 622 4742
www.villageinnbirmingham.co.uk
/villageinnbirmingham

THE WELLINGTON
72 Bristol St, B5 7AH
Tel: 0121 622 2592

West Midlands

CANNOCK

CANDI CAINE'S CABARET LOUNGE
3 Church Street, WS11 1DE

COVENTRY

GLAMOROUS COVENTRY
88 Short St, CV1 2LX

KIKI LOUNGE & LOFT
Earlsdon High St, CV5 6ET

THE YARD
11-12 Bull Yard, CV1 1LH
Tel: 02475 012 959
www.theyardcoventry.co.uk
/TheYardCoventry

DUDLEY

BAR DIVA
76 Lower Piaza Mall, King Street, DY2 8NZ

GLOUCESTER

THE WESTGATE
Westgate Street, GL1 2NF
Tel: 01452 690045

SHREWSBURY

HAVANA REPUBLIC
18-21 Abbey Foregate,
SY2 6AE
Tel: 01743 271821
www.havanarepublic.co.uk
/HavanaRepublic

THE PEACH TREE
18-21 Abbey Foregate
Tel: 01743 355055
www.thepeachtree.co.uk
/ThePeachTreeRestaurant

STOKE-ON-TRENT

GOSSIP
4 Hope Street, ST1 5BT
Tel: 01782 204957

PINK
93 Stafford Street, ST1 1LS
Tel: 01782 272772

TELFORD

THREE FURNACES
30 Bridgnorth Rd, Madeley
TF7 4JB. 01952 588521

WALSALL

THE LION
Birchills St, WS2 8NG
Tel: 01922 610977

THE RED LION
Park St, WS1 1NW
Tel: 01922 637790

WOLVERHAMPTON

PRINCE ALBERT
Railway St, WV1 1LG
Tel: 01902 540672

GORGEOUS
School St, WV1 4LF
Tel: 01902 427247
/gorgeousbar

WORCESTER

THE FLAG
50 Lowesmoor, WR1 2SG
Tel: 01905 780467

VELVET CLUB
Angel Row, WR1 3QN
Tel: 01905 20218

East Midlands

LEICESTER

DOVER CASTLE
34 Dover St, LE1 6PT
Tel: 0116 255 3052

HELSINKI
94 Rutland St, LE1 1SB
Tel: 0116 254 7568

RAINBOW & DOVE
185 Charles St, LE1 1LA
Tel: 0116 254 7568

VENOM
(YOLO) Gay every Wed
Belgrave Gate, LE1 3GR
Tel: 0116 251 7986

NORTHAMPTON

THE BOSTON
College St, NN1 2QP
Tel: 01604 604404

NOTTINGHAM

NEW FORESTERS
St Ann's St, NG1 3LX
Tel: 0115 958 0432

THE NEWMARKET INN
38 Lower Parliament
Street, NG1 3BA (Gay
Friendly)

PROPAGANDA
8 Broadway, NG1 1PS
0115 979 9183

TO UPDATE YOUR LISTING, PLEASE EMAIL

MIDLANDSZONE.CO.UK

WIN! Tickets to The Cher Songbook in Birmingham!

Would you like to Turn Back Time? If you're a fan of the ever-magnifi cent Cher, then a visit to The Alexandra Theatre in Birmingham on the last day of the month should already be in your diary.

If you've not yet bagged yourself a seat, we've got FOUR TICKETS for the show to give away to one lucky reader!

Recreating the classic look and the legendary sound, The Cher Songbook is the ultimate tribute to the ultimate artist. Promising dazzling costume changes and outstanding musicianship, this one-night-only show features all of Cher's classic hits, including: I Got You Babe; Gypsies, Tramps & Thieves; Just Like Jesse James; If I Could Turn Back Time; Walking In Memphis; Strong Enough, Believe - and songs from Cher's 2018 homage-to-Abba album, Dancing Queen.

Believe - The Cher Songbook shows at The Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham, on Thursday 31 January.

Enter the competition via our Facebook page at @midlandszone

Mindfulness:

Access the power of NOW

Regretting the past, fearing the future and finding life stressful? Then why not take a holiday from it all by becoming mindful and focusing on the present moment, as Stephen Spinks explains...

As we all know only too well, life has become increasingly frenetic. There's not a moment's pause in the grind of the daily commute, while the countless emails sitting in our inbox seem to be demanding our undivided attention 24 hours a day

Much without realising it, we've become slaves to our daily rituals; passive observers of the world marching by beside us. It's easy to lose perspective.

It's no coincidence that, as life becomes busier, more and more of us are realising that we need to take a moment to pause. Our bodies are finely tuned machines that often know better than our heads exactly how we feel. But we don't always know how to read them, especially with regard to how we're really feeling and when we ought to slow down.

Stop and think for a moment. When was the last time you felt down - or even worse, depressed? When was the last time you had little interest in doing anything, preferring instead to sit on the sofa and watch TV, flicking from channel to channel and not really settling on anything? How many times this week have you woken up tired and wanted to stay in bed, but the buzz of the alarm and the demands of the day have dragged you out of it, no matter how many times you've hit snooze? How many of us haven't been able to sleep, waking up after only a few hours despite feeling knackered before bed. A lot of us, most likely.

As the pace of life quickens, we find ourselves ploughing on regardless, because that's what we believe we need to do to get on in life. Yet our bodies are telling us to slow down; to stop, to sleep, to just 'be' for a while .. So why don't we listen?

Some of the most common signs that our wellbeing is compromised include skipping meals, loss of appetite, overeating for comfort, feeling sluggish or without energy, becoming restless, irritable, quiet or distracted.

There are other signs, too: anxiety, nervousness, a feeling of being 'on edge', worrying about the smallest things and feeling that you can't let go of them, or that you have to be in control. All these signs, to varying degrees, point to being overworked, overrun and not able to find enough headspace to take care of ourselves

Many of us feel guilty about pausing for a moment. There is, after all, so much to get done! And we worry about other people's perception of us. What if I'm not seen to be pulling my weight at work? What will my mates say if I don't join them on that night out? The fear of being judged, or of letting someone down, is often why we carry on charging ahead. Yet pausing doesn't need to be as hard as we may think it is.

Mindfulness has become something of a buzz word these last few years. It sounds a little too hippie for many people. Yet the technique is hugely popular because the benefits derived from it are so profound.

Mindfulness is simply a means by which to live in the present; to access 'the Now'. Take some time - an hour, a day, or simply just a minute - to stop, pause and become grounded. An important part of mindfulness is reconnecting with our bodies and the sensations they experience. This means waking up to the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the present moment - something as simple as the feel of a banister as we walk upstairs, for example, or the experience of standing in a garden or outdoor space and listening to the sounds around us: the wind in the trees, the noise of passing traffic, the footsteps of people walking by, the smell of fresh air, the feeling of raindrops falling on our face. It's a quick focus; nothing more

Professor Mark Williams, former director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, says that mindfulness means knowing directly what is going on inside and outside ourselves, moment by moment. It s about allowing ourselves to see the present moment clearly. When we do that, it can change for the better the way we see ourselves and our lives

So why bother? Well, because the more we do it, the more we suddenly reconnect with the present through our own self awareness The more we become self aware, the more we can see the immediate environment we are in and regain control of it. The more we practise mindfulness, the more we begin to understand our bodies, including its aches and pains, meaning that we can begin to identify patterns in our life and put in place strategies to deal with the pressures. In short, it allows us to take back a bit of control.

You can practise mindfulness anywhere. The simplest method is to sit on a straight-backed chair or sit cross-legged on the floor or on a cushion, close your eyes and slowly breathe in and out a few times. Take the time to notice your body. Ask yourself, where are your aches and pains. Listen to what your body is telling you. Are your shoulders, legs, arms feeling sore? Relax your shoulders. Let them just hang low Breathe in and out again. Listen carefully to the sounds around you. What can you hear? Just listen for a few minutes. Really listen. Take the time to understand what you have felt and heard, then stop, end on a smile and carry on with life.

Sounds crazy, doesn't it? But it really works. Try it.

The first few times people have a go, they often notice that the mind wanders, running off to other thoughts and associations, like what to cook for dinner or whether they switched the gas off; but if this happens, it's okay. Just start again, with a few deep, slow breaths. The more you practise it, the easier it gets.

The amazing benefit of mindfulness is ultimately that it can make you feel grounded and in control. Suddenly, all the pressures of the day seem more manageable, and you feel that you can deal with them on your own terms. You've taken back control, re-energised yourself and increased your chances of overcoming whatever challenges your day may bring you.

There's plenty of advice on the internet about mindfulness, and a number of videos to watch on YouTube.
Why not give it a try? You might just be amazed.

Beautiful Britain

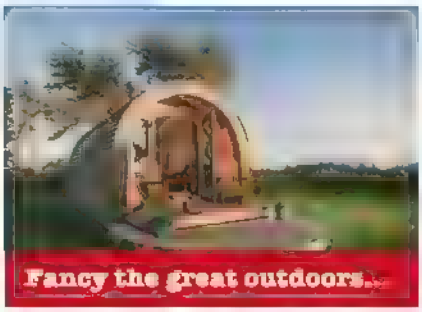
With the Brexit blues set to continue, there's never been a better time to pack a suitcase, organise the other half or a gaggle of friends and head off into the sunset. But you don't need to dig out your passport and pay a fortune in foreign exchange rates to reconnect with your inner peace, with 2019 looking set to be another amazing year for the 'staycation'. You'll never be more in vogue, darling!

There's so much to discover. **Visitengland.com**, its Scottish and Welsh counterparts and **Discovernorthernireland.com** are just brimming with information. If something a bit more gay-specific is your preference, **travelgay.com** offers details about gay-friendly hotels, bars, shopping options, saunas and cruise clubs.

It also features maps to help you navigate your way around the best gay-friendly places in the UK. **Outofoffice.com** will likewise help to individualise your trip, whether you're heading to the pink triangle in Edinburgh or the taverns and culturally-rich bars and clubs of Vauxhall in London.

Whether you're single, a couple or a throuple, there's never been a better time to explore this sceptred isle.

With so much to see and do, why not make 2019 the year that you drag out your bucket list and finally start ticking off those things you never thought you'd actually get around to doing? Check out some ideas below.



Fancy the great outdoors...

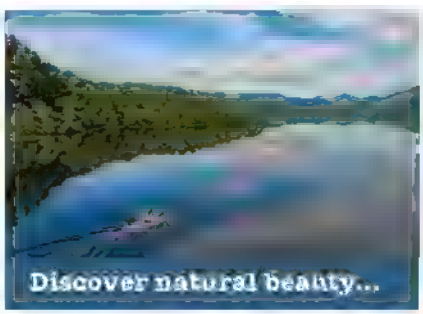
...but not the 'roughing it' miseries of camping? Well how about glamping instead? Glamping is camping with the pure luxury of feather beds, log burners and electricity. Don those Hunter wellies and head to Craig Wen in Snowdonia. Or live out your childhood dream and spend a weekend in a tree house at Cotswold Camping in Shipston-on-Stour.

Up for a scream?

Amusement parks are just as popular today as when you were a kid. Alton Towers, Drayton Manor and Thorpe Park are all high-profile destinations where you can get that adrenaline-head junky rush. Book up to five days in advance to get mega discounts, or dig out that Tesco Clubcard and call in your points. After all, points mean prizes!

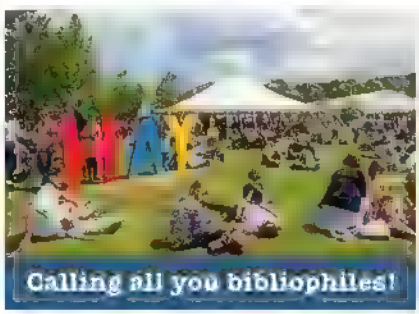
Tension in your trapezius?

Then it's time to unwind, relax and forget all about the stresses and strains of life. Whether it's Hoar Cross Hall in Staffordshire or The Charm in Brighton, a spa break is just the ticket to recharge in comfort. With day tickets and residential stays available, unwinding with friends couldn't be easier.



Discover natural beauty...

Inspired by the beautiful scenery in the movie God's Own Country - and I don't just mean Josh O'Connor and Alec Secareanu - you can get up close and personal with nature by exploring the great outdoors. With 10 national parks in England, three in Wales and two in Scotland, from Loch Lomond to the New Forest there's no shortage of great natural beauty waiting to be discovered. So pull on the walking boots and visit **nationalparks.gov.uk** to download walking maps, trails and a passport to spiritual refreshment! It's also great for those into mindfulness.



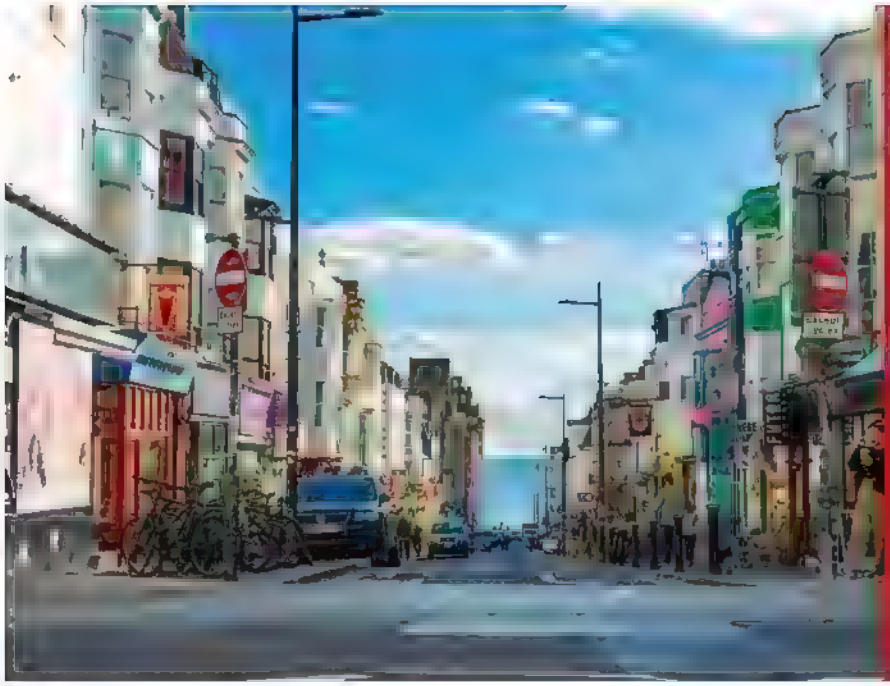
Calling all you bibliophiles!

If a nose in a book or keeping up with your latest author is your thing, why not get out and about to enjoy a literary festival or several? From the internationally popular Hay Festival to smaller, lesser-known events, get your books autographed, be inspired by first-rate talks and find out all about the latest book releases. See **literaryfestivals.co.uk** for details on the countless events taking place across the UK in 2019. And while you're at it, why not visit Gays The Word in London, the amazing community-led queer bookstore that featured in the hit movie, Pride?

Wanting to give something back?

Volunteer working parties are perfect for those who're looking to get away while at the same time doing something good for the community. In exchange for board and food, turn your hands to dry stone walling, laying pathways or clearing plastic from beaches. Make David Attenborough and your mum proud! With over 170 working holidays to choose from, see **Nationaltrust.org.uk/holidays**

Partied hard?
Why not make getting a sexual health check-up a New Year's resolution.
We're open 7 days a week
offering sexual health testing and much more.
Birmingham LGBT's Sexual Health Services Team
wish everyone a Happy New Year.
www.blgbt.org/sexual-health
Tel: 0121 643 0821
Birmingham LGBT
Supported by umbrella
Get tested from home for STIs including HIV.
Order your free kit now: umbrellahealth.co.uk/testing



Shop 'til you drop!

Indulge in a weekend of retail therapy. With city slickers making for London, Leeds, Manchester, Edinburgh and Nottingham you'll find everything from high-end fashion to high street and bespoke retail. Glasgow remains a mecca for designer junkies, while Brighton is a calling card for any self-respecting New Bohemian.

Fancy being the next MasterChef champion?

We'll get practising and polish your culinary skills at one of the many cookery schools dotted around the UK. You could take lessons from the master himself, Raymond Blanc, at his cookery school in Oxford. Half day to full residential programmes are available, starting at £95 and taking place at the breath taking Le Manoir Aux Quat'Saisons. On a budget? The Swinton Estate on the edge of the Yorkshire Dales offers an introductory lesson for £35.

Follow in the footsteps of the stars!

Re-live Chris Pine camping it up as Robert the Bruce in Outlaw King by visiting many of the sites featured in the movie. See **visitscotland.co.uk** for a film map. Alternatively head to Gloucester Cathedral to admire the breathtaking cloisters, or Northumberland's Alnwick Castle, used in the Harry Potter films. Game of Thrones more your thing? Check out **visitbelfast.com** for the must-see locations. No wonder Belfast is the 'Home of Thrones'!

Ever wondered what goes into your favourite drink?

With an abundance of gin distillery tours available in London, the heart of the gin revolution - including the City of London Distillery in Smithfield, the East London Liquor Company in Mile End and the grandaddy of gin, Beefeater in Kennington - you can't fail to appreciate first-hand the skills of the craftsman who pour their love into your favourite tipple.
Gin not your thing? Then why not head to Scotland and take in the heady, smoky, leathery fragrance of whiskey at the Glenfiddich distillery in Dufftown, Banffshire
Or how about the Penderyn Distillery at the foothills of the Brecon Beacons, the only whiskey distillery in Wales and high up on the must-see list. They've got my vote!

With so much choice, Britain really is your oyster. The biggest challenge now is deciding what to do. Happy adventures!

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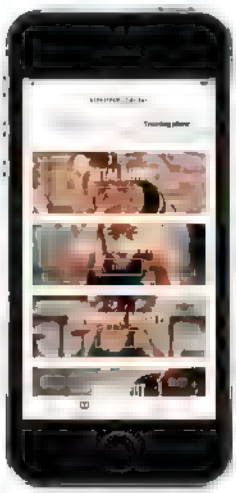
LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Is the thought of entering a gym too daunting? Then check out our favourite at-home workout tools...



◀ Fiit - The Workout App

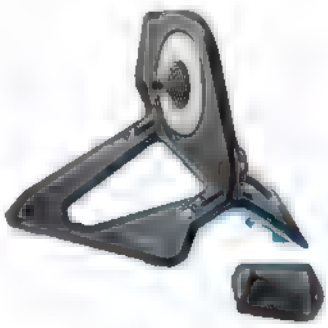
Fiit is a new form of connective fitness that enables you to choose from a large variety of specialist classes from HIIT to Hatha taught by the world's favourite fitness instructors and connected to your TV via a mobile application. A strap worn across the chest tracks your performance and allows you to compete against yourself and others. This online interactive platform brings the best of boutique studio fitness into your living room, allowing you to work out from anywhere in the world.

Monthly Plan - £20 / Quarterly - £45 / Yearly Plan - £120 (all prices include Fiit chest strap with accelerometer)

Tacx NEO Smart 2 ▶

The renewed and improved NEO 2 Smart is the quietest, most realistic and accurate indoor bike trainer available. This allows you to turn your bike into a home gym, letting you choose your specific level and chart it with training software. You can even select a surface to ride on, with everything from cobbles to dirt roads being accurately replicated.

£1,199 tacx.com

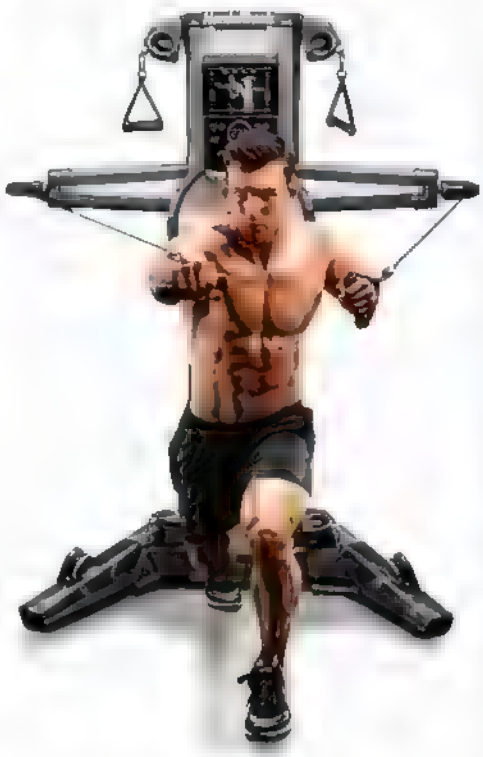


NordicTrack Fusion CST Fitness Machine with Tablet

Transform your fitness with the NordicTrack Fusion CST. High-intensity strength combines with cardio and iFit Coach Streaming workouts.

The Fusion CST comes with an android tablet containing the NordicTrack Cardio Fusion App and one year's free subscription to iFit Coach, which provides all the benefits of HIIT workouts and great classes in the convenience of your own home.

£1,999 johnlewis.com



▲ Peloton bike

The Peloton bike brings you a convenient and immersive indoor cycling experience, streaming daily live classes from their NYC studio directly into your home. You'll have 24-hour access to studio cycling classes available to your entire household. With celebrity fans that include the totally toned David Beckham and Hugh Jackman, this is definitely something we fancy trying out.

Prices start at £1,990 onepeloton.co.uk

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LIFE OF A THIRTYSOMETHING GAY

"U = U"

At the start of December, along with many others, I marked World Aids Day It is of course a moment where, globally, people pause and come together, to reflect on those living with HIV and remember those who are no longer with us, having succumbed to this terrible virus

It's estimated that around 37 million people across the world are currently living with HIV, and for years, this global pandemic looked unstoppable as it cut down swathes of healthy men, women and children

HIV has been in the consciousness for as long as I've been alive, the first related diagnosis being made in 1980, only a year prior to my birth. Subsequent decades of scientific research have now determined that the HIV virus, or its earliest strain, was first passed from chimpanzees to humans as far back as 1929 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, most likely a result of man's hunting, butchering and eating of these simian cousins. Cross-contamination of blood over a sustained period of time was sufficient for the Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV) to make its devastating leap, and later mutate, into what would become the first strain of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) in humans; HIV-1. The virus therefore has been around for nearly 90 years, but the fatalities prior to the 1980s went unreported, simply because they were small in number. The deaths were attributed to unknown causes or other determined illnesses.

The arrival of HIV in the western world came earlier than most imagine. In 2003, analysis of HIV types found in the United States, compared to known mutation rates, suggest that the virus may first have arrived in America in 1968. Yet it was from 1980 onwards that gay men in New York, San Francisco and elsewhere first presented themselves to hospitals with rare forms of diseases such as Kaposi's Sarcoma (a rare cancer) and a lung infection called PCP, brought on as their immune systems began to collapse as a result of the impact of the HIV virus. The rest of the timeline becomes something of a well told, if tragically lived, history

It wasn't until 1987 that the first treatments began to arrive, but these had limited success and many side-effects. Ten years later came HAART, reducing death rates by 47%. By 2010 there were 20 different treatment options, and with the advancement in ART (Anti Retroviral Therapy), huge leaps have been taken in recent years in terms of controlling, and then surprising, the virus. In 2019, HIV can now be suppressed to such an extent that someone who has the virus can reduce their viral load so significantly that they become 'undetectable'. Once undetectable, the HIV virus cannot be transmitted to someone who doesn't have it, even during bareback sex. In a nutshell, U=U (Undetectable Equals Untransmittable) states that people living with HIV who are on antiretroviral therapy and have been undetectable (less than 40 copies in a millilitre of blood) for at least six months cannot infect others through sexual transmission.

Let's just pause a second and be really clear about what this means. If you, as a HIV negative person, have unprotected, condomless sex with your latest crush, who is undetectable, they cannot pass on the virus to you.
This is a game-changer!

Medical trials have been conducted for some time to determine whether in fact this statement really lives up to its claim. Among the most notable trials was the Partner study. The study looked at 888 serodiscordant couples - that is, where one partner is HIV positive and the other negative. Thirty-eight percent of them were gay male couples, the rest were heterosexual. The trial was conducted in 75 clinics in 14 European countries and tracked 58,213 condomless sex acts, both anal and vaginal. Again, like in previous trials, the HIV-positive sexual partner was on antiretroviral therapy for at least six months - and the study showed zero linked transmissions

This has to be the biggest and most

rewarding achievement to date for all those who have been tirelessly working in HIV prevention. Endorsed by more than 350 bodies from 34 countries, HIV organisations who joined the U=U campaign have heralded this milestone. We should all now be singing this message from the rooftops - yet I can guarantee that few among the community in the Midlands have really heard about or believe it, instead feeling it's just another one of those headline-grabbing statements behind which there's nothing of substance.
Well, it's not - the evidence is there for all to read!

As a HIV negative gay man, I've always been amazed and deeply horrified by the stigma and prejudice surrounding HIV that exists in our community, especially when aimed at those who carry the virus. As a child of the 1980s and '90s, I vividly remember the ads, the news and the hysterical media stories that encouraged HIV shaming and stigma. Those stories seeped into global society's very core, as prejudice and hatred were fuelled and justified by fear. But this surely cannot be justified anymore. To find it every day in my own community has always been heart-breaking. Can we not now set aside that entrenched fear and begin to see HIV for what it means and is today; and more importantly, recognise that we all have a role to play in overcoming it?

Understanding that Undetectable Equals Untransmittable is the duty of us all. Only with knowledge do we have the strength to build a brighter, more loving future for everyone in our community; masc, femme, gay, bi, trans, HIV-positive, negative, undetectable, and much else besides

We all truly deserve and have the right to be loved for simply being who we are.

CAT'S CORNER

"Porn popularity"

It's official! The most popular porn on the internet is lesbian porn. And why not?! It's got everything - breasts, women's bottoms, lady kissing, more breasts. Who could want anything more?!

Apparently, men could.

While women were searching for lesbian porn more than any other category (on the two chosen porn sites - PornHub and YouPorn. Obviously, I personally have never heard of either site...), men were less enthusiastic about women-on women action.

When men were asked, lesbian was only the 6th and 10th most popular search term on PornHub and YouPorn respectively. I'm a bit disappointed actually - I thought lesbian porn was the most popular cross gender porn, appealing both to women *and* men. Turns out, men have other interests too.

The theory behind the popularity of lesbian porn amongst women is that women like to watch what they want done to themselves - hence 'licking' is a popular sub-category search.

Of course, the whole idea of women watching porn is a pretty new concept for many people. The common perception was that women played bingo and men watched porn. However, the internet has really messed things up. Not only are women now watching porn but men are actually playing bingo. It's a brave new world.

The internet is becoming a truly levelling resource. Accessibility to the internet in this country is becoming incredibly widespread, with few barriers to it.

Gone are the days when you had to sneak into an 'adult shop', or stand on a chair in the newsagents to look at the top-shelf magazines. Basically, if you can spell 'porn', you can watch it. Actually, you don't even have to be able to spell it. I just put 'pron' into Bing (other search engines are available), and it did the job just as well... So as long as you have access to a mobile phone, porn is now possible.

For the first time, women are genuinely on their way to equal access in terms of watching porn. The making porn industry, of course, is still a different matter.

While I'm a great fan of the equal access to information and online experiences that the internet is bringing us, I do think that another force is significant when it comes to the popularity of lesbian porn. As anyone who has watched porn recently (not me, obviously) will be very aware, male porn 'actors' are universally unattractive. I think the popularity of women-on-women action is not just about the lure of seeing two women, it's actually just our attempt to avoid having to look at the ugly men in porn films.

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Place: 30 Bedford Street South, Leicester LE1 3JR

Splash Spa & Leisure

Day: Tuesdays
Time: 11am - 2pm (Last appointment 1.40pm)

Day: Thursdays
Time: 3pm - 6pm (Last appointment 5.30pm)

Place: 61 Bedford Street, Leicester LE1 3JR

TRADE

You can also check out Trade Sexual Health

www.tradesexualhealth.com

ON THE BALL with Steve Ball

Gay cure

Thirty years ago, when my youngest brother came out, our parents sent him to the GP. I'm not sure what they thought the doctor would do, but even if he knew what gay conversion therapy was, he rightly suggested that it was my parents, rather than my brother, who needed therapy.

Last year saw the release of two films about so-called 'gay cure', a technique that's a mix of religious dogma and dodgy science, the cruelty and ineffectiveness of which has been widely documented.

The Miseducation Of Cameron Post was followed by Boy Erased, starring Nicole Kidman and Russell Crowe. The latter is based on Garrard Conley's memoir and tells the story of Jared Eamons, a college student struggling to come to terms with being gay. His panicked parents enrol him in a conversion therapy programme designed to change, or at least suppress, his sexuality.

The controversial practice ranges from private prayer, fasting and counselling, to deliverance ministry, hormone treatment and, according to the government, 'corrective rape' involving forced sexual activity with someone of the opposite sex.

Yet despite a promised government ban, there are claims that 'gay cure' therapy is still prevalent among religious groups. Last month, the Ozanne Foundation, a Westminster-based charity that promotes equality and diversity in religious organisations worldwide, launched a survey of Britons who have tried to change their sexual orientation. It will be interesting to see what that reveals, but speaking personally, one thing is certain; no amount of therapy would convert me to a life of heterosexuality. Being forced to watch Love Island and Take Me Out on the telly and no amount of staring at page 3 of the Sun would convert me to straightdom.

As I look ahead to 2019, I know that my life is much richer as a result of my gay friends, family and experiences.

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THE VIRAL ROUND-UP

Here's what we've been looking at online...

We all do it - spend hours on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Often we're distracted from what we should be doing by cat videos and funny pranks - or by something feelgood that's been shared so much on the net it's officially classed as 'viral'. Well, here are some of Midlands Zone's favourites from the past month!

YouTuber fires back at VS anti-trans comments

Trans YouTuber Nikita Dragun has responded to anti-trans comments made by a Victoria's Secret senior executive in the best way possible - by posting a smoking-hot video of herself wearing lingerie.

Dragun took to Twitter and Instagram in response to Ed Razek, chief marketing officer for Victoria's Secret's parent company, L Brands, who said that trans models shouldn't take part in the lingerie brand's fashion show because the event is a 'fantasy'.

The model posted a video, writing as a caption: "Dear Victoria's Secret, you said trans women can't sell the 'fantasy', so here I am as a TRANS WOMAN selling the FANTASY!"

Check out Nikita's video and pictures from her Victoria's Secret-inspired shoot on her Instagram **@nikita_dragun**

Gay teenager comes out during school assembly

Finn Stannard, a student at St Ignatius' College in Sydney, Australia, recently took the plunge and made a moving speech to 1,500 of his classmates - and their teachers - about his struggle to come to terms with his sexuality.

In a video shared by SBS News, Finn tells a packed room: "I've been working towards this speech for four years. In those four years, I have come to understand who I am, and how to not be sorry for being myself."

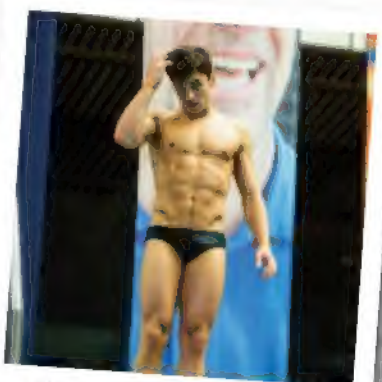
The power of Finn's words is plain to see when the entire student body gets to its feet at the end of the speech and gives him a rousing standing ovation.

Watch Finn's full speech at: **www.sbs.com.au/news/full-speech-finn-stannard-s-2018-keynote-address**

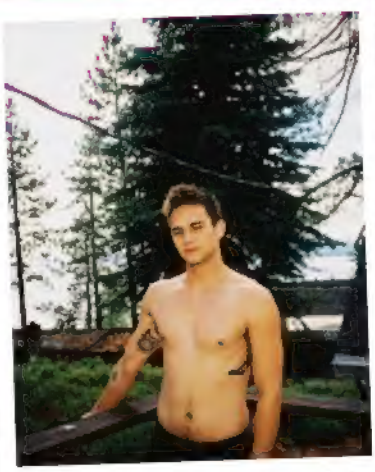
CELEB SNAPS!

Our fave Insta pics from this month...

Ariana's teasing us with a BTS of recording YET ANOTHER album **@arianagrande**



We should really get into this whole diving thing... **@tomdaley**



Brandon Flynn goes topless on log cabin retreat... **@flynnagin11**

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